Mrs. Denys of Cote

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MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "STRAIGHTFORWARD," ETC.

"Have we not all, amid life's petty strife,
Some pure ideal of a noble life
That once seemed possible—and just within our reach
We lost it. . . .
But still our place is kept, and it will wait
Ready for us to fill it, soon or late."

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.
1879.

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UNDER THE NEW ORDER.

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BOOK THE SIXTH.

UNDER THE NEW ORDER.

MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN THE HEIR WAS A BOY.

"They who provide much wealth for their children, but neglect to improve them in virtue, do like those who feed their horses high, but never train them to the manage."—SOCRATES.

THE prosperity of Cote did not ebb for any long period. When the rector came back from his twelvemonth's tour abroad, the tide of fortune had returned, and was flowing higher than ever. The graves of Richard Blythe's household were green in the churchyard, and there was moss on the headstone that Mrs. Denys had raised to their memory. The Orchard had changed hands, and was

spreading itself out into beautiful gardens, and the old thatched cottage was improved into the lodge of a fine modern mansion, whose occupants became neighbourly by and by to Cousin Elizabeth Paul. The next years were full and busy, which made them seem the longer, but one after another they came to an end, every one leaving some piece of good work, begun or finished, towards the making of Cote. All sorts of men had fair times; for the building never ceased, unless for the weather, from the day the foundation-stone was laid of the new church, and the first sod turned of the Green Square.

At the Manor House life went on very much as aforetime, with the regular migrations to London, to Scotland, to Auldcaster, Navestock and Acklam, to Paris or Rome; the most-felt loss or difference being in the interrupted intercourse with Mr. and Mrs.

Essex-Brough during the long winters which they now spent chiefly in some warm resort of invalids. Mr. Essex-Brough had been compelled by the progress of his malady to drop his active occupations, and when they were at the Glen House he was almost always a prisoner in-doors, which kept his wife a prisoner too. Their visits were a rarity, and it could hardly be said that Mrs. Denys regretted them, but her husband had that constancy of temper that made him never grow accustomed to missing the society that was a habit with him.

The years since the redemption of Navestock had been well spent too. Nature forgives her injuries and repairs her neglects gratefully. The land laughed now with bountiful harvests, and flocks and herds multiplied upon the hills. Under the new order had begun a reign of moderate prosperity, and a certain equality of

comfort and well-being prevailed amongst all conditions of men. There was no farm unlet, nor any farmstead otherwise than whole and sound. Gates and fences had everywhere got themselves mended or renewed. There were signs of knowledge and enterprise amongst the new tenants, all young men brought up to their business, displayed in the endeavour to naturalise foreign crops for the increase of food and other material of existence. Minor industries, the keeping of bees and poultry, and the cultivation of fruit, were encouraged amongst the cottagers; and to the village school was attached a rood of ground where boys and girls both were systematically instructed in the right method of growing common flowers, and the cheaper vegetables, good for food all the year round. The poor gentle people who found Navestock a pleasant and inexpensive home, did not care to devote

their gardens to the service of the kitchen, and there was a market at their own doors for the thrifty, intelligent folk who could use it; or if Navestock failed to consume all it produced, Beauminster was not far off, with its plentiful ready money for nosegays, fresh eggs, and green stuff that the shopkeepers wanted.

The place owed a great deal to its clergyman, the Rev. Arthur Meade. Sunday and week-day he was full of life and energy, and he had a perfect helpmate in his young wife. Since their marriage, Navestock rectory had become a sort of half-way house and neutral territory where the numerous connections of both their families met—Meades, Daventrys, Brittons, Herricks, Denyses—a very great clan, mustering four generations.

Mr. and Mrs. Denys paid frequent visits to Navestock, but they did not put up at the

rectory. Mr. Denys preferred to take his ease at the inn, which was the old inn rebuilt across the road from the church. He had caused to be provided there sufficient lodging for himself, his wife, son, servants, and horses, and sometimes they occupied the place in force for a week or ten days. On these occasions there were always at the rectory one or two friends from Auldcaster or from Knowle. Delia's people had insensibly drawn nearer to her since Wilfred's death, and Hugh Oliver, who usually came to Navestock with his father and mother, added by degrees to his acquaintance first and second cousins of all ages. Mr. Denys put no hindrance in their way. The passage of the years was measured by their growth, and it seemed no long time to Delia before this boy of hers was tall enough to take her arm, and hold up his head nearly as high as her own.

It had been remarked of Hugh Oliver when he was quite a little fellow that he had a look of the judge. His mother thought the likeness strengthened. His father protested that he was no beauty. Lady Daventry declared that he proclaimed his paternity in every feature of his face, and Lady Daventry was right. He was his sire over again, in build, countenance, and character, said Cousin Elizabeth Paul, and other traits of resemblance were only casual gleams that came and went in the very moment the eye caught them.

Hugh Oliver had been presented annually to his relations at the House with Golden Gables, but the prejudice that attached to his father had so far infected him that Sir John Daventry and his wife were possessed with the notion that he was not a good or lovable child. It was at Navestock that this opinion came to be revised. The judge had heard much praise of

Mr. Denys' administration there, but he had seen none of the results. The great house that had been pulled down he recollected in the days of its pomp and splendour, and he had passed by it, and through the deserted village, in their period of degradation and ruin. Now the wilderness blossomed again, and his curiosity was roused to contemplate this work of a man whose entrance into life had been a stumble on the threshold, and a fall that had disabled him for some of its most honourable functions.

When Sir John Daventry became better friends with his great-grandson, the boy had passed for some time out of the hands of Mrs. Consett into the hands of Mr. Orme, the young clergyman who served the iron church which Mr. Denys had provided at Cote until the new church was finished and consecrated. It had been determined to give Hugh Oliver

his education at home until he was twelve years old, and then send him to Rugby. Mr. Orme belonged to Mr. Denys' people, and had been one of the fortunate legatees under old Sir Oliver's will—*fortunate*, because the money had paid for his education at Cambridge, and left him a small competence over, entitling him to choose his profession. His father had other sons, and could spare him; he said only, when he made up his mind to be a clergyman, that he trusted he would be a good one. As he was moved to take holy orders by the simple, passionate motive of love for the Leader whose faithful soldier and servant he desired to be, there was every likelihood that his father's confidence would be confirmed. Mr. Orme the elder was a merchant of the type who increase by labour, a man of integrity, with good traditions behind him, and heirlooms of silver-plate, old delft-

ware, and furniture, such as accumulate and are preserved in old houses where children of the same name are born, and marry, and die, generation after generation. His son resembled him, and the early bias and impress that Hugh Oliver Denys took from his tutor was good in every way.

It was on a certain Sunday morning in July, beautiful weather and very warm, while Mr. and Mrs. Denys were at Navestock on business, and their boy with them, that Sir John Daventry and his son drove over from Beauminster where the assizes were on, in the intention of going to prayers at the church, which neither had seen since it was restored. The service had begun, and Hugh Oliver, who faced the congregation and the open door, saw them come in, and whispered to his mother on her knees: "Mother, here's grandpapa and old grandpapa;" and then hospitably beckoned

them to come up higher, to the great pew in the chancel sacred to the ancient squires of Navestock. Mr. Denys was in his place, grim as any of their monumental effigies, and it was Communion Sunday. Delia had inquired of her husband beforehand if he would stay, and he had said that he would, but at the end of the sermon he took his hat, signed to his son to follow him, and walked out of church.

Hugh Oliver was of an age to understand that there was division between his elders, and to wish the uncomfortable gulf bridged over. He was a large-hearted lad, strong and self-reliant, who would let ill winds blow as they list, and to-morrow would forget them, and proceed to make good their mischief. Before he was put under charge of Mr. Orme he had received all his religious teaching from his mother—teaching of a plain, wise sort

which made no difficulty of discerning right from wrong, and referred him to Holy Writ for the eternal laws of life and conduct. He had no perplexities about himself yet, but his father perplexed him often. This abrupt walking out of church disconcerted him immensely. He wondered that a grown man like his father did not observe more measure and reserve in his dislikes, and he was hurt for his mother, whose blush and downward look betrayed her pain. However, it was done, and Mr. Denys mentioned that as she would have company at luncheon they two might take a long stretch up the fields to the Warren House, where they had not been this visit—Hugh Oliver was used to be much made of there.

"Cousin Ralph's wife will give us a crust of bread-and-cheese, and let you plunder her gooseberry bushes. Loose Bruno, and let us be off."

Hugh Oliver loosed the dog in the stable-yard, and brought him round. He was glad enough to go with his father, but he was sorry to be leaving the others too. He wished all the world were friends. From his standpoint it seemed so easy. He knew how his mother looked up to old grandpapa and loved him, but he felt that his father and he were kept at a distance. More than once it had happened at the House with Golden Gables that his fine spirits had betrayed him into trespassing on Lady Daventry's rules and customs at home, and on these occasions there had been an edge of severity in the judge's rebuke which exceeded the offence. The very last time he was there Sir John had told him that if he could not conform himself to the ways of the house he had better not come to Auldcaster. It had dropt quite out of his mind that morning in church, but as he followed

his father it recurred to his mother, and she feared that he remembered the admonition with resentment. It was not so: his goodness of nature was unimpaired. When the judge spoke harshly he looked at his fault, and thought he deserved it; and took care not to be to blame a second time for the same cause. And thus he passed unharmed by slight injustices which others noted.

The walk up the fields to the Warren House was glorious for prospect, but fatiguing in the mid-day glow and glare. Since Hugh Oliver was there last, there was one less in the house. The gentle younger daughter had gone the way of all flesh, and her sister, by the face of her, was not far from the end of her painful journey to the same bourne. She was alone in the parlour, lying on a couch by the open window, wrapped in a soft white gown, to which she

referred with thanks as a gift that Mrs. Denys had sent her. This was the first word she spoke: "Tell the lady I wear it every day, and it will not be worn out when I have done with it."

"I will tell her," Mr. Denys promised, and sat down in the shade at a distance, regarding her with sad concern.

Hugh Oliver took his place close by the couch—previous years' acquaintance with the gooseberry bushes had made them friends. The girl rested her fever-bright eyes on him, and held one of his brown fists in her burning hands.

"How do you do, Hugh Oliver Denys, true son and heir of your father? You are come to see me before I die?" she asked.

"Yes," said the boy, struck with pity and confusion.

She laughed: "Hear to him! He makes no account of dying—none at all. He thinks nothing of the deep disgrace of death. But mind—it is not my shame; it is my inheritance."

"I had a brother once, and he is dead," Hugh Oliver whispered by way of apology and consolation.

"I had a sister once, and she is dead—we are equal there. Now, *I* am going into darkness, but *you*—you will live long, and see good days. If any one tells you that you were born under the curse, don't believe it. *We* were."

Her mother came in. "I do not know where Ralph is, sir. He is out somewhere with his gun," she said to Mr. Denys. "He always carries his gun for company—Sundays and workdays alike."

Mr. Denys inquired with solicitude about

her husband's health, saying that he regretted to have heard unfavourable reports.

"They're partly true and partly false, no doubt," replied the wife. "He is more and more restless of nights and wild in his talk. All day he is afoot, yet he sleeps hardly ever: up and down, crying that the house is afire, or thieves breaking in, like a man out of his mind. I am used to it now, but he has frightened me terribly sometimes."

The open window commanded a long view of the rough cart-road to the house, and Hugh Oliver from his place espied a tall figure advancing towards it with many a tired halt and gaze across the blinding expanse of sunny heath.

"There is Cousin Ralph Denys, papa—he is coming," he said softly, as if he might be heard.

Mr. Denys rose and looked out, watching

his movements for some minutes, but retiring to his seat before he appeared.

His wife met him in the entrance, and warned him of their visitors: "Ralph, my dear, Mr. Denys is come."

"I've been seeking him," was his answer, so quick that she had not time to mention the boy, and he stood in the door-way. His countenance was dreadful — black with rage and spite, malice and cruelty. They saw it, all of them.

He advanced into the room, and set his gun in one corner, then thrust his hand on Mr. Denys with the discordant remark: "They shake hands with the hangman, Cousin Hugh. I've seen them do it."

"Your mind runs on dismal events, Cousin Ralph," Mr. Denys said coolly, and stood up confronting him with stern, controlling air and attitude, as a bold, strong man stands

when he is menaced by another who is not, perhaps, master of himself.

"Poor father, sit down by me — come," said the sick girl in a tone of persuasion. "*Come.*"

Hugh Oliver had retreated to the window, and left his chair empty. Ralph Denys cast himself into it, and then stared about, heaving great sighs. "Do you miss nothing, Cousin Hugh?" he said in a quieter manner, looking at him.

"Yes, I miss poor, pretty Angel."

"We buried her when the corn was sowing, and here's Diavola spreading her wings to fly before it's cut. Then we shall be alone, my wife and I, and there'll be the blessing on Sunday after sermon—'And this I pronounce for doom—the sins of the fathers upon the children until they be all dead, dead, dead.' Is that boy yours, Cousin Hugh?"

"Why, you know he is. You have seen him many times."

"Indeed? I remember none. It was the day before yesterday that never comes, perhaps. And by God's grace, you hope to rear him?"

"By God's grace, I hope to see him grow to man's estate, and to leave him my shoes."

"That's good. I'll say a prayer for him. The world's turned upside down since we were young, and not mended. I rode on horseback then—— Why do you pluck at my sleeve, Diavola?"

"You are half asleep, father — wake up. You talk so strangely."

"*Never let them persuade you I am mad.* I know what I do as well as any man breathing. It was hot in the sun round New Place, and Cousin Hugh had taken sanctuary in church. *I shall meet him another day.* The

lane's long that has never a turning. If dinner's ready, let us go to dinner."

Mr. Denys exchanged a glance of dismal intelligence with his Cousin Ralph's wife as they went to the room where the meal was spread. It was a poor meal, and interrupted by more brief disjointed sentences which might have conveyed to Mr. Denys grave warning of some danger to himself being schemed in his Cousin Ralph's disordered wits. But he manifested no sort of apprehension. Only on their road back to the inn he took his son into his confidence on another matter.

"It would make your mother uneasy to no purpose if she were told the chief part of what passed at the Warren House to-day. We must keep it to ourselves, Hughie," he said.

"Yes, papa," the boy answered, and looked up in his father's face with pale resolution.

He knew very well what they were to keep.

There was silence between them for a few minutes, and then Mr. Denys continued: "You will soon be going to school, Hughie —we have always been friends? We have never fallen out?"

"Never, papa," and he slipped his hand affectionately within his father's arm.

"I overheard poor Diavola speaking to you of being born under the curse—a curse of diseased blood hers, poor child. But there is an old story for you to know concerning this estate of Navestock—if you have not learnt it by some side-wind?"

Hugh Oliver had learnt it in various versions, out of which he had constructed a theory which left his father not much to communicate. The boy blushed in making the acknowledgment. His Uncle Cricket had given him his

first information, and then he had inquired of Mr. Orme. Old Crump had let in a little light, and the patriarchal Todd had let in more. Mr. Denys made no comment on his son's reserve, but only invited him to say what was the moral that he deduced from the ancient tradition, and its modern sequel added by himself.

The boy feared that his father was displeased. "You are not angry with me, papa? I was interested and listened. Everybody knows at home. Phœbe knows," he said with eager self-exculpation.

"I am not angry with you, Hughie. Our servants are witnesses against us, and our children sit in judgment on us," Mr. Denys replied. "You know the old story—that is enough. And you know what your mother and I have done and foregone to lift the load of Navestock from your shoulders. We trust

you may outlive us. You can undo our work when the time comes, if so be that you are minded to undo it."

"Papa dear, I shall never be minded to undo it—I shall never undo it," Hugh Oliver said urgently. "Mother has talked to me."

"If your mother has talked to you, I take your word. And now I want you to apprehend clearly my motives in doing it, that you may not fall into the mistake of some of our neighbours. You are not to ascribe it to any superstitious dread of Divine visitation, nor to any sentimental view of retrospective justice. You are to ascribe it only to this—that more land fell to me by inheritance than I was able to do my duty by. And land is like nothing else: it pays a hundredfold for love and labour, but when men hold more than they can use and care for, it goes barren. Navestock had gone barren over half its

acreage when our old kinsman came forward for its redemption. Now it is cultivated like a garden, and scores of thrifty people divide its profit where once all was not enough to feed the wants of a single prodigal."

"I will try to follow in your steps, papa, and be a good man."

"*Good*, my son? There is no man that liveth and sinneth not."

When Mr. Denys and Hugh Oliver reached the inn on their return from the Warren House, the judge and his son were still there. Mr. Denys met them with a civility quite unlike his customary coldness, and seemed even gratified to find them waiting his arrival, which Mr. Daventry was determined to do. He saw little enough of his son-in-law, but he never avoided him. To Delia the difference in her husband's manner was strange, and

so marked that she asked him what had happened.

"Nothing has happened," he said. "We have been up to the Warren House, Hughie and I. Diavola sends you thanks again for your white gown. Cousin Ralph is as bad as they say. It would be desirable if his wife could prevail on him to go to the sea for a long change. I conjecture that he has pretty well emptied her purse, Delia; and you had better give her money into her own hand, and suggest it."

It was no secret that Ralph Denys, or Wayland, was a pensioner of Mr. Denys of Cote.

When he had answered Delia, Mr. Denys turned to the judge, and without preface inquired what he thought of the restored church. Sir John Daventry said that he thought it very well done.

"Have you been over to New Place?" was the next question.

Delia and her father had been, but not the judge—he feared the heat of the day. Mr. Daventry gave his opinion of New Place, that it was delightful, and the site finer than that of the old house which had been removed.

"It is certainly healthier," Mr. Denys said. "There has been neither death nor sickness there yet, and it has been ten years inhabited."

"Do you mean never to make it your own residence?" Sir John Daventry asked.

"I have another purpose for it," Mr. Denys answered. "Speaking of that brings me to something else that I want to say. Hughie has given me his word to let all we have done here stand. That is good news for his mother. Hughie will keep his word."

"Does he know what he promises?" said the judge, regarding the lad.

Hugh Oliver was lounging in the deep window-seat a little jaded with his long walk, but at a bidding glance from his mother he stood up and answered for himself. "I believe that I know," he said. "Cote is to be enough for me, and Navestock New Place and the land traced in red on the survey are to belong to Guy Francis Meade. It is he —the hero—who is to restore the ancient family. All the Navestock farms are secured to the tenants in possession by long leases, and any of them can be made freehold. The small plots that gentlemen have built on the same. The cottagers' leases will go, some to the squire at New Place, and some to the rector, to improve the benefice, and provide a curate and lay-reader in the parish. And the advowson is to be given up to the bishop."

"Why so?" asked the judge, who was rather in favour of limiting public authorities than of enlarging them.

"Because Guy Francis Meade, the squire that is to be, belongs to the Roman Catholic communion," Mr. Denys replied coolly.

"And Denys of Cote will be for ever quit of Navestock," remarked Mr. Daventry. "But how comes it that Captain Meade is a Papist?"

"His mother belongs to the Roman Catholic Church," Mr. Denys said, and offered no further explanation.

Sir John Daventry was reflecting on what he had heard, and considering Hugh Oliver's countenance with quiet approval. He was disposed to believe that Mr. Denys had done wisely in preparing his son's release from the burden of a second great estate in land, and Hugh Oliver's recital of his lesson raised no

demurs. The distribution seemed the best possible, made with foresight and a sentiment of natural justice that the judge had not suspected as existing in Mr. Denys' mind. It was an infused sentiment probably; Delia had it, and in these years her husband and she lived in close counsel together.

When Sir John Daventry was about to order his carriage to return to Beauminster, he asked if Hugh Oliver could go there with him for a few days. Mr. Denys referred the question to his wife. Delia was glad of the opportunity. Her boy was being gradually equipped for independence and school, and it was good that he should walk about in other company, and feel his feet, before his leading-strings were quite severed. Hugh Oliver also was pleased to go, but the prosaic circumstance of being badly in need of his dinner deferred their departure until after that meal

had been eaten—and eaten by all of them at one table. Which was the end of a rash vow Mr. Denys had made, never to break bread with any of his wife's house. And virtually it was the end of the alienation that had been the abiding grief of her life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DAMOCLES' SWORD.

"In the midst of life we are in death."

When the redemption of Navestock was first begun, Sir John Herrick had made the remark that Mr. Denys was putting his house in order as if he were going to die. He might have repeated the remark had he been witness to his proceedings during the few days that Hugh Oliver was away at Beauminster with his grandfather and the judge. Mr. Quorn came down from London, sent for express, and Delia supposed that the affairs to be arranged were of moment and of present consequence from her husband's close application to them,

and his willingness to dispense with her society, on which he was accustomed to make large claims.

At his instance she drove over to Auldcaster early one morning to spend a long day with her mother, and also at his instance she brought back her brother Cricket to occupy Hughie's room in his absence.

Cricket was a young man now, and had so far got the better of his infirmities that he could move about with a crutch. His character had developed on the lines that were its marked traits when he was a boy. He still loved his sister next to his mother, and said biting things to her with the same certainty that she would bear them quietly, and be good to him none the less.

Delia drove him about the country in an easy, low pony-carriage, and showed him the view from the Three Beeches, and the site of

old Navestock one afternoon; and the next she drove him to New Place, and let him hop up and down, and in and out, and all round about until he was tired. He had been very curious to see New Place.

"Cote must be a delightful house if it beats this," he said when his inspection was finished.

"I don't care for New Place at all," Delia responded.

Cricket eyed her with malicious scrutiny: "You have been well tamed, Sister Dil," he muttered.

She turned to him with a wistful deprecation, and just said: "Yes, Cricket, Love and Death are wonderful tamers. Pride and ambition cannot stand against them." Cricket was silent, and perhaps ashamed. Presently Delia went on: "You think my life has disappointed me, dear, but that is not so.

If it has not given me what I expected, it has given me things much better worth having. I can speak to you here—I never could speak to you at home. I should like you to see Cote, and then you would understand. Navestock was redeemed by Sir Oliver Denys not for us, but to be given back to the Meades. But Cote is ours, and we have watched it grow and thrive almost as we have watched our boy. We are not so rich in money as some imagine, for we spend as we get, but we are far richer in peace and happiness. I would not change my lot for any woman's I know. And if you talk of ambition, is it not a fair ambition to build a town? Cote covers more ground than Auldcaster now. It is full of groves and gardens, and the last three or four years some most beautiful houses have been built on the slopes of the down. The Green Square is nearly completed, and de-

serves a journey only to see it. When the new church is consecrated, you must come to the Manor House, and I think you will say that if my marriage vexed you in the beginning, it has been so blessed in its continuance that I do well to thank God for it. I do thank God for it every day I live!"

"How about Damocles' sword, Delia?" Cricket asked with cruel emphasis—and repented the moment the words were out.

"You mean the curse that I did not believe in once? It is nearly five years since my little Willie died—I have not thought much of the curse since. But I hope in God, Cricket, and fear nothing for the son I have left." Delia walked gently on to close the conversation, looking upwards with sweet, clear eyes, hopeful and trustful too.

Cricket perceived that his sister had suffered a change beyond her taming, and that he must

learn her anew. He had some opportunities. He saw her under various aspects—gracious and good when he went with her to fulfil the commission that Mr. Denys had given her to his Cousin Ralph's wife ; glad and good when he went with her to bring Marie-Irene away from her convent for the summer holiday ; loving and tender and good when Hughie came back from Beauminster, feeling himself so much taller by as many days as he had been gone from her control, and showing it by strange acts of independence.

"Hughie is a dear boy, Uncle Cricket—say you think so," his mother whispered, wanting a comfortable word of kindness from him.

"Oh, yes, he is a dear boy. I know him. He will have his own way," his Uncle Cricket answered.

"Like his own father," Delia said, and was perfectly satisfied.

There was something very touching, even to her sarcastic, crippled little brother, in Delia's reasonable affection for her boy—not over-careful, nor over-anxious, but never weary, and never failing. If Hughie seemed rather to encroach and be exacting with his mother, that was, as she pleaded, because he had no playfellow at home besides her. His father was certainly no playfellow at this moment, but Hughie waited on him, and watched for him, with a devotion not common amongst boys of his age. Cricket thought it quite remarkable, and noticed that Mr. Denys was both sensible of it, and glad of it. The father and son were, as they had said, good friends. In affairs the boy could be of no use, but every hour that his father was at liberty he called Hughie to him, to ride, to walk, to come and talk, and rest. "It is their manner," Delia said. And it seemed impossible that confidence could go

further unless they had stood as equals and friends on one level.

When they returned to Cote, the squire was observed to be more than usually busy in the place. He was often in consultation with Old Crump, and took many circuitous walks, of which the object was first reported to Mrs. Denys for her opinion, and then submitted to Mr. Quorn and Mr. Clarges, and to others who might be more or less concerned. Delia had been anticipating an interval of repose from business about this period, and she asked her husband if there was not time enough yet for some of these arrangements, and if such and such decisions could not wait. Mr. Denys never pressed her on any matter at the moment when she objected, but left it till a convenient season when she would, perhaps, recur to it herself. It dawned upon her pre-

sently, that there were things he wanted to have finished, or finally determined on, to do or not to do them.

One day he told her that he had done all that he had promised for the new church—he had given the land, the stone squared, and the timber—and the subscriptions made in and out of the parish must provide all else. That the new church would have many splendid gifts was sure; for it was a beautiful building that devout souls might have a joy in adorning.

It was on this occasion that he said further: "Not to hamper Cote with a heavy debt in the beginning, I have had marked out a site for the schools which the Education Bill will soon compel us to provide. The old buildings are overcrowded now. It is my intention to give the stone and the timber—the same as the church. And we must have a Board. Clarges prefers the voluntary system, and the chief authority in

his own hands; but we must look forward. We must have a Board, and a rate which will touch everybody. It is no easy matter to collect the subscriptions now—half the people have an excuse, good to themselves, for not giving."

Mrs. Denys, like the rector, would have preferred the action of private munificence, but private munificence, he told her, signified reserved private rights, inimical often to the public good, and he declined to let any be created for the future embarrassment of the community. Mr. Orme was with Mr. Denys. He was not afraid of the electors, and did not doubt that the School Board of Cote would comprise amongst its first members the gentlemen who formed the existing committee, in which confidence he was subsequently justified by the event.

A third thing there was that Mr. Denys

begged his wife specially to note. "I have pledged to Orme that triangular bit of land in the lower village where Crispin's shop stands," he said. "It is one of the last of the old leases, and Orme wants it for a workman's club. There have been applicants for it, willing to give a very heavy ground-rent, because of its three frontages; but it lies in the midst of the workmen's houses, and a public building there will be a more attractive feature at coming into the town from Marshleas than a tavern, or a group of shops that are not needed."

Mrs. Denys was not likely to forget this behest. It was almost too much her inclination to exercise a maternal despotism over the labouring folk in Cote — to be very good to them according to her own notions of goodness, but to govern them a little too much, as if, because they were busy with their hands

all day, their heads had not time to grow to years of discretion.

"And will you give the stone and the timber for this building also, Hugh?" she asked.

Mr. Denys paused on the question, and finally replied that if he lived he would. He wished her to bear in mind that it was not a charitable institution he proposed, but a club managed by the most capable amongst the men themselves—such as had a stake in Cote, had houses of their own, and were settled to spend their lives there. And he mentioned several by name who, he said, possessed every qualification necessary for the purpose.

With these deferred arrangements it was Mr. Denys' pleasure that Hugh Oliver should be made acquainted. The idea was promulgated suddenly. "It is time you saw a little of what business is, Hughie," he said one morning at breakfast. "When you go to

school I shall lose you for the best part of the year; and after Christmas you must go."

Hughie looked serious, but not unwilling. The process of seeing what business was turned out occasionally tiresome, but he gave diligent attention to what was shown him.

"You will remember this," was the frequent form of his father's appeal, and the lad's response was always: "Yes, papa, I shall remember."

During the five years that had elapsed since the first sod was turned of the Green Square the progress of Cote had sustained no check. The square itself was a nearly-finished place, of which every house and shop and stall had its qualified occupant. The new church bulked against the sky, walls and roof and tower up, invested with intricate scaffolding yet, but advancing towards completion. The worth of large ideas was proving itself. Cambourne

had gone faster than Cote, but it had not gone so well. Mr. Midas had made more money than Mr. Denys, but he had not invested it so securely. Whatever had been done in Cote remained a satisfaction to the eye; and though Cambourne had the pull over it for natural beauty, Cote, by careful self-adornment, had earned the better measure of success. The ancient rivalry was extinct in the bosoms of Cote. They had run a race for the leadership in popularity, and Cote had won by a long stride.

That Mr. Denys should rest and be thankful, was the common sentiment of his neighbours just when he seemed less inclined to rest than he had ever been since he began first to work at the development of his property.

"There will be time enough for resting by and by," he said to Delia when she hinted a remonstrance. He appeared to her to be taking

some premature steps, aspiring, perhaps, to govern his share in the world when it should be no longer his, and acquiring certainly a new reticent habit. It was by a mere chance that she learned he had given to Mr. Quorn instructions for a will—having made a will, of which the provisions were known to her, some years ago.

"If you did not look so well, I should think you had a presentiment of evil," she said on this discovery. "Tell me, Hugh, if there is any trouble coming that you foresee."

Mr. Denys shook his head with a decided negative, and professed himself surprised by her adjuration. "There is nothing," he said, "nothing—unless it be the shadow at the Glen House. That is a cloud, and a heavy cloud. Essex-Brough has asked me to see to the disposal of his horses before we go to Scotland. He will never ride to the meet any more, but

there may be a long lingering before him. I would rather encounter sudden death."

This explanation seemed adequate to Delia. "You must give Hughie a strong little horse, and let him ride with you once a week when the hunting begins," she said.

"So I will. He can spare a day from his lessons, and it will help to make a man of him."

"And ask John to come down."

"John has his own affairs, and his family. It is not so easy for him to leave London. I have thought lately, Delia, that I should like to make over Acklam to John—we rarely stay there ourselves."

"Indeed, dear, I have not a word to say against that. John is your eldest son."

Mrs. Denys never had a word to say against anything that her husband wished to do for John, or George, or Marie-Irene. It

was her sole desire concerning them that they should be brothers and sister to her boy—a position that was becoming more difficult than when they were younger, as it was sure to do, with the best will in the world to be quiet and content in it. The result was that George, since he went last to Italy, had never come home at all, and that John came rarely. It was the natural evolution of the circumstances, and had to be endured in silence.

Hugh Oliver knew his place as his father's heir, and took it as his right. Whether he liked his introduction to business or not, in Scotland that August he was proud to carry his gun; and in October, when the hunting in the peninsula began, he rode in the field with the pluck of a lad to the manner born, and emulous of a great example. Mr. Orme gave in to his enthusiasm after a single movement of reluctance and apprehension. Hunting

days stole many hours from the working week, and Hugh Oliver, though he had a fine capacity, and did not sleep over his books, was not a first-class scholar of his age. He had had altogether a great deal of play, but his father pronounced that he would do better at Rugby for possessing physical prowess and moderate lore; and the tutor, who had not Rugby experience to speak from, did not gainsay the squire's judgment further.

Though Mr. Denys had denied to his wife that there was any occult reason for his late access of activity, and was even able partially to dissemble with himself, in an interview that he had with Mr. Quorn soon after the truth came to the surface, and, translated into plain speech, was sufficiently startling. He confessed that he never went to Navestock now but he went, as he believed, in peril of his life.

"My poor cousin, Ralph Denys, is as mad as any lunatic in Bedlam," he said. "He has threatened me once or twice, and will have me some day, I know, for he's a dead shot. But I shrink from proposing to put him under restraint. And his wife would not consent to it either."

Mr. Quorn argued strongly for prompt precautionary measures.

"None would avail but shutting him up, which is sooner said than done," Mr. Denys replied. "Once let him suspect any design on his liberty, and he would be only the more of a danger to me. I have ordered his gun to be taken away, but I am not obeyed."

When Mr. Denys had said thus much, perhaps he regretted that he had said anything. Mr. Quorn knew his Cousin Ralph by his bad reputation, but not personally, and could have no judgment of his own on his condition, and

Mr. Denys did not care to be regarded as going in fear. The lawyer, however, took what he had heard for indirect orders to inform himself further, and did so with the result of arriving at the same conclusion at his employer. The man was mad, no doubt, but with so much method in his madness as to be quiet under the investigation of strangers, and with his wife to protect him against the separation she dreaded, he was more than a match for his cousin, who would thankfully have been delivered from the terror of him.

When Mr. Denys found that the hazard was not to be removed, he requested Mr. Quorn to say no word of what had been attempted to ward it off; and for any sign that he betrayed afterwards he might have been quit of the recollection of having ever admitted such hazard at all. Naturally he was a man of high courage, on whom impressions of the sort were

not liable to linger with any dejecting effect, and their sharp recurrence at intervals only quickened his sympathies for those belonging to him, and set him more eagerly to finish his work that he did not want to leave undone, and a burden to them, if he were suddenly taken away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A PROJECT OF MARRIAGE.

"L'homme propose—Dieu dispose."

When Hugh Oliver went to Rugby after Christmas, Mr. and Mrs. Denys re-visited Rome, where George, the artist, seemed inclined permanently to set up his easel. This time Marie-Irene was of their company—a most lovely girl.

For a year or two past Marie-Irene had left her convent during longer intervals, which were spent chiefly in London, at her father's house, and under Mrs. Denys' charge, for the sake of lessons in music, which was her passion. She had great gifts, and it was

desired that she should be highly cultivated. Before Easter they were joined in Rome by Captain Meade. It was an arrangement, of course. He had come from India by way of Trieste, and proceeded to Rome for the express purpose of meeting Marie-Irene, who was understood to be in a perfectly blank and unconscious state with regard to these ulterior views of her father in which she was interested. It is likely that she was so, and so remained for a considerable while, being a sweet, modest, light-hearted young lady, not tuned to sentimental airs, but enjoying the sunshine and bright present day with singing and dancing, and all simple pleasures that go to make young life mirthful and happy.

Captain Meade was satisfied with her beauty and her good-humour, with her goodness too, which was of a genuine sort. But he did not fall into sudden captivity. Marie-Irene seemed

too much of a child yet, and too little of a woman. He felt as old as the world beside her. Since he was in England last he had been in love—in earnest, passionately—and mammon, with some magical letters to its name, had worsted him. He had done valiantly, and more successfully in war; for he had won the Victoria Cross. He had been wounded twice, and one of his wounds marred (if a girl chose to think so) the splendour of his countenance. Marie-Irene did not think so; for she had a natural turn towards hero-worship, but she agreed with him in feeling that he was a person of great age and experience, whose opinion might be taken on questions of casuistry, but who was not to be pelted with *confetti*, or otherwise evened with George's comrades of the studio whom he was permitted to introduce to his sister.

Marie-Irene had made the acquaintance of

one of these more than willingly. Tom Rose lived and worked under the same roof as George Denys, and had watched over him in an attack of fever the previous summer. He was as poor as a church mouse, but full of genius, and thrifty. When he was under the divine afflatus he went into retreat and barred his door, and a sweet, interrupted whistle was all the sound of him that his neighbours heard until his task was accomplished or his inspiration spent, when he would emerge, and go out to hear the sea-winds in the pines at Castel Fusano, or to enjoy a frolic at Frascati, being, when he recovered his speech and his spirits, of all comrades at play the merriest and the best. Marie-Irene called him "Tom Rose," with occasional notes of admiration appended; and Captain Meade, on rather inadequate evidence, assumed that she had a tender parti alit

for the artist-student which became her better than gentle deference to himself. In fact, Captain Meade was in a low key, in no humour for courting. His heart was sore from his recent disaster, and he would have taken more enthusiastically to the young lady had he not been expected to marry her. He made Mrs. Denys his confessor, and mentioned an imaginary necessity he was under of appearing at the first *levée* after Easter, and the real impatience of his mother to see him at Updeane. Mr. Denys tacitly acquiesced in his departure, and said only that he must call on Mr. Quorn before he left London.

"Are you going home? I thought we were to travel to the Lakes and through Switzerland together," Marie-Irene said without any shyness or after-thought at all when his departure was announced.

"I may return," Captain Meade said quickly.

"My mother at Updeane is waiting to see me."

"*Au revoir*, then," rejoined the young lady; and it was not observed that her natural flow of spirits was abated by his absence, though, indeed, he had been very useful as an escort while he was there.

When Captain Meade had paid his homage to the Queen he went down into the country, to Updeane. Updeane was an old house, a garden, an orchard, two or three fields, and a little farm-steading, remote from any considerable town, and not touched at by either main road or line of railway. It was here the Meades had kept their footing in the county since the time when Navestock was taken from them. Out of this old stone house, quarried in the hill where it stood, and set on an eminence with its face to the sun, had gone forth those men of distinction whom Mr.

Denys spoke of to Sir Oliver; and hither, if they missed the rewards of honour, had they come back to rest and lay their bones. How many of them had died at home the church register attested.

Money had never run in that family, but the want of it had not been severely felt until the present generation, when the eldest son wandered off to Australia, and was glad to turn farmer when he wandered back; and Guy Francis, the youngest, yielding to stern necessity, had consented to think of a desk in a merchant's office, but, scared by one glimpse of the dreary inaction of that life, had preferred to take the Queen's shilling, and climb the steep path of glory from the ranks. He had done it in a long stride or two, and old soldiers talked of him as only a boy yet. When he presented himself at Updeane, the wearer of the bronze Cross of Valour, his mother kissed

him, and wept over him, crying: "Rather that, my dear son, than ten thousand times its weight in gold!"

Mrs. Meade was a gentle lady, good, not austere, true to noble traditions. Guy Francis was her favourite son. He seemed more especially to belong to her because he had been brought up in her religion. She was a daughter of an ancient Catholic family, very poor, and had married his father with the customary proviso that the boys born of their marriage should be trained as Protestants, and the girls given over to her. But she never had a girl, and when Guy Francis began to learn she had the first teaching of him. The results were not hard to foresee. When he was of an age to choose, he was received into the Romish Church, and though he was not a rigid pietist, he continued faithful to his creed and obedient to her rules. It was this that

had guided Mr. Denys in his selection of the youngest son rather than the eldest, to carry out Sir Oliver's scheme for the restoration of Navestock, and on this he grounded his hopes of a happy marriage for Marie-Irene.

Mrs. Meade lived alone at Updeane, and kept the place in order, supervised by her eldest son, always patiently looking forward to the perfect days when Guy Francis would return from India on a long furlough. She had not anticipated his return with a name that would be echoed beyond their own county, but she quickly heard that it was a famous name, welcome in great houses of great people up in London. Captain Meade had duties and friends many elsewhere, and went and came on frequent short visits, but he sat down for the most part contentedly by his mother, relating to her his adventures and misadventures with the gusto of a hero and

a traveller who feels that his tales never tire the ears they are poured into. He recalled to her in many a story the boy who got a perilous joy out of an old punt on the river, and hunting out of the rough, half-broken colts that went to market as soon as they were fit to be sold. They were wonderfully happy together. With his mother he was full, even florid, in his details, just because she loved them, and none could be too much.

Of course, it happened one day in the plenitude of confidence that he told her of his abortive passion—how it began, and how it had ended: "Be very sure, my dear, that she was unworthy of you," was the lady's unhesitating verdict.

Perhaps Captain Meade was tending towards a similar conclusion. At all events, he ceased to feel like a man who has lost a treasure, and was able to take an interest in life that had

been absent from it in Rome. He paid a visit to his brothers at Navestock, and from that date he appeared to forget a great deal, and to look forward more. Mrs. Meade had heard nothing yet of New Place and Marie-Irene, but her son judged that now was come the time to speak, and he spoke so as to necessitate few questions to make the case clearer. His mother listened in silence. It was not easy to set it in an entirely flattering light, and her feeling was distinctly one of regret that her son should stand in such a position. She hoped that the young lady knew nothing of it.

"I am not aware that she knows anything of it. I should certainly believe that she does not," Captain Meade replied.

A description of her was asked for. The description was as complete as the previous story.

"She has been admirably brought up; she is beautiful and good, and has a sincere devotion. I am told that she is the very copy of her mother, pretty foreign graces and all. At Rome she seemed to care more for the joyous artist tribe her brother George lives with than for staider company; but Arthur and his wife tell me that she takes the colour of her surroundings, and at Cote is a very charming specimen of the English country girl."

"They approve her then, Arthur and his wife? Your heart begins to incline towards her also, I think? I will not attempt to advise you, dear. The decision does not rest solely with you. One circumstance is painful to me —you know what I mean. If you loved one another——" Mrs. Meade was on the point of saying, "that might be a solvent," but she stopped short. In her secret mind she would have preferred that this son of hers, of whom

she was most proudly tender, should have no fortune but Updeane, and no wife but his sword, rather than he should be rich and blessed in the fortune and the wife that the hereditary enemy of their house proposed to give him.

Mrs. Meade called Mr. Denys on this occasion the hereditary enemy of their house. Her son reminded her that old enmities had been cancelled by his brothers' acceptance of Mr. Denys' benefits, and that in the present generation the two houses had exchanged none but friendly acts. She made him no reply; she said no word more, neither then nor ever had they any argument; but her prejudice was evident and not unreasonable, and her influence was felt. She avoided any further manifestation of curiosity to hear more whether of New Place or of the young lady, and when her son spoke of either afterwards, she just responded,

and passed on to another topic. Captain Meade could not complain. His brothers were advocates for Mr. Denys' projects, but his own views and sentiments varied from day to day, and nothing would fix them but the rise of a mutual attachment, which seemed doubtful yet. If his mother had spoken out, she would have said, that when he could tell her that the girl had won his affections she would open her heart to her, but until then she would live in hope that some way of release might be found for them both from a situation the pains and penalties of which neither he nor Mr. Denys seemed to have taken into account.

CHAPTER XL.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

"Some wives by patience have reduced
Ill husbands to live well."

W. WARNER.

MARIE-IRENE was not disappointed of her tour to the Italian lakes and through Switzerland though Captain Meade had gone to England, and did not return, as he had intimated that possibly he might. To please her the time was even extended through May and half of June, which shortened the season in London to a single month. That was long enough for Mr. Denys now, and twice in the course of it he was up and down at Navestock, on business of which he did not say much to Delia. His

mind seemed pre-occupied with grave, not to say anxious, thoughts, and his interviews with Mr. Quorn were frequent. There was trouble at the Warren House because of his poor cousin, Ralph Denys, which ended in his consignment to a keeper; but he was not put under any stronger guard than could be kept over him at home, living under the same roof as his wife.

Captain Meade was still staying down in the country, and Mrs. Denys made some inquiry about his proceedings after her husband's second visit to Navestock.

"Meade is all right," Mr. Denys said. "He is recovering health and tone together. And New Place is re-let for a year."

Marie-Irene was not to return to her convent any more as a school-girl after the journey at Rome, but to take the place of a daughter that was given her in her father's house. It is

not to be imagined that this passed quite free of criticism. Mrs. Moth had something to say of the unlikelihood that any gentleman would marry her—a girl born out of wedlock, and a Papist besides. But Mrs. Moth, though a representative woman, was not all the world, nor the best part of it. Marie-Irene passed with the majority as do other girls possessed of beauty, grace, talent, and a fair dower besides. Her religion was the real difference, for that was her life.

When Captain Meade met the young lady for the third time, she was assisting at a reception in the Dutch garden again. Her white gala gown and blue ribbons were still much in the fashion of the little girl he remembered laughing at his stories in the same place half-a-dozen years ago, and she looked so sweetly serious that the impulse seized him to tell her a story, just to see her laugh now. Marie-

Irene was perfectly obliging. The consequence was that he caught her blithe humour, and learned, like other men in trouble before him, that life goes forward, and the sun, hidden awhile behind the clouds, may break out at any hour of the day, all the lovelier in its clear shining if there have been rain.

It was Marie-Irene's birthday that day, and those who were privileged to know it had brought her gifts for love-tokens. Mr. Clarges had brought her an exquisite spray of his favourite Devoniensis rose—a white rose just unfolding, with buds and glossy leaves—and in presenting it he had made her one of his pretty, old-fashioned compliments that he was famous for. Marie-Irene was pleased and touched; for she was fond of the old clergyman from a child, and he had been always good to her.

"Come and talk to Hugh Oliver's mother.

Hughie has won the prize for swift running," she said, and offered her hand to conduct him to Mrs. Denys. Mrs. Denys received him with kind civility, and thanked him for his congratulations, but they got no further. Hughie's mother preferred to talk of her boy with Mr. Orme.

" Clarges, I am glad to see you here," Mr. Denys cried, arriving to his old friend's deliverance, and they walked up and down under the yew hedge arm in arm for a long while.

It was generally remarked how well and hearty Mr. Denys looked that afternoon—how sturdy and upright—with no care in his face, and with a ready word for every one. Cousin Elizabeth Paul, who had come bringing Marie-Irene a handful of pearls that she would never wear any more, was greatly struck. " Life goes better with him," she said to herself. " He is more and more like what

he was meant to be." Fat Colonel Hayman and Sir John Herrick were as cordial with their neighbour now as if he had never offended, and they had never stoned him.

"If Denys would stand for the county, he would have as fair a chance of being returned as any man I know," Colonel Hayman roared with boisterous laughter, as if the thing were a good joke, but true for all that.

Delia heard him, and a delicate faint colour tinged her cheek. "They are speaking of my dear husband," she said to a lady, almost a stranger, who was pacing the lawn at her side.

"You have a right to be proud of him," the lady answered. "I knew Navestock well when I was a girl, and I have often heard since what Mr. Denys was doing there. The Meades are of our connection. Mr. Denys has had great opportunities, and has known how to use them."

"He has, indeed, and I like to hear it acknowledged. And Cote—do you enjoy Cote?" Mrs. Denys asked.

"Yes. I think I was never in a prettier little town, and I have been half the world over since I was married. We have our lodgings in the Green Square, above the hosier's shop where the golden ivy is trained up the door-posts. We came in on a fine Saturday evening, and were quite taken with the lively stir and picturesqueness of the place —like some foreign scene with the people walking about and the band playing under the trees."

"Most of our visitors are captivated by the rural charm of the old village, which we have done our best to bring into the new. Time will stand our friend, and tint and clothe what is cold and bare yet."

"And you have religious privileges. The

old clergyman looks benign, and Mr. Orme can preach a sermon to do one good."

"Mr. Orme is only hired for a term, but we trust to keep him permanently when the new church is consecrated."

Mrs. Midas ran up to Mrs. Denys with both hands out and a gush of greeting, and the stranger moved away. Poor, pretty little lady, her clothes grew finer every season and her manner more effusive, keeping pace with her husband's increasing wealth and unpopularity. Mrs. Denys had come to be rather sorry for her. She had a restless vanity and love of display, and suffered profoundly from her secret consciousness that no real *prestige* attached to her position as the squire's wife at Cambourne. Cambourne, like Cote, had welcomed immigrants from the ends of the earth —Jews, Greeks, stock-brokers, and others, all complete infidels as regards the title of country

squires to receive honour when by their deeds they have deserved none.

"I don't believe that some of them even know who we are," Mrs. Midas added in a plaintive whisper when she had recounted to Mrs. Denys some recent, awful instance of trespass on their cherished prerogative.

Mrs. Denys forbore to smile: "You have a set-off against what you complain of. Mr. Midas is sufficiently appreciated by his own friends," she answered with gravity. "They have made him chairman of the Rowboro' bench since Sir Martin Deane Foxe retired. And have not the way-wardens of the peninsula elected him their chairman—in blunt rejoinder, as it would seem, to the appeal made to them against him for closing a pleasant walk which is claimed as a right of way?"

"Oh, that was political influence. Old

Boreas showed on the other side, and we are still masters of the situation there. But it was, perhaps, too much zeal."

"It was certainly too much zeal. It was a very great pity that Mr. Essex-Brough should think it excusable to circulate a lie with a circumstance to serve your husband in such a case, and that Mr. Barter and Mr. Sale should put their names to letters prepared for the newspapers in his solicitor's office. But it was a still greater pity that local authorities, holding a trust for the public, should appear to consider a gentleman who accepted such services the fittest amongst them to rule their counsels. While gentlemen go these lengths for one another, and call it *loyalty*, we must expect strangers, educated in a different school, to break out in contempt of them sometimes, and raise a shout for justice."

"And not get it," Mrs. Midas added with

a titter of foolish triumph. "It was made a party affair, you know, and we won."

"You won, I know. Whether the principle that gave you the victory may not entail a worse ultimate loss remains to be seen. The judge, my grandfather, is very angry that such pranks are being played and condoned in the name of his political party. He says that common feeling has now a strong, steady drift in favour of courage, character, and noble conduct."

"Oh, nothing succeeds like success! I love to win — the means don't concern me, nor whether the cause is altogether good. Party spirit cares nothing for common feeling."

"More's the pity—it has the truer touch," Mrs. Denys said a little sadly.

The two ladies had turned into the broad walk, and saw coming towards them their respective husbands. No two men could have

afforded a more striking contrast. Time was dealing kindly with Mr. Denys, who had got the better of his accidents and misfortunes, and carried his nearly sixty years with robust ease; while Mr. Midas, never very wholesome to look at, had now the flushed face and thick utterance of a man who drinks habitually too much wine. His success had not entirely succeeded. He had lost the swaggering pomposity of gait and manner that he had when he was younger, and walked with a heavy foot, and head hanging down. When first he dipped his hand into the lucky-bag of fortune he drew a rare prize, and his aspect proved, if anything could prove it, that he had not been equal to his gift. He had drawn Cambourne for his inheritance, and had cared no more for it than if it had been a mere mine to dig money out of. Just now he was at his wits' end, driven hither and thither by

the multiplied mean vexations of business in arrears, neglected, muddled, and mismanaged. His steward had gone off with a large plunder, and had left him to reap the consequence of trusting his affairs to a man whose want of integrity had been long a common tale.

The gentleman had been up to the new church. "We shall be ready for the consecration next summer, Delia," Mr. Denys said to his wife as they met.

"Before next summer, I hope, Hugh. And what does Mr. Midas think of the ground we have laid out to bury our dead?"

Mr. Midas answered that it was not what *he* thought, but what the bishop might think, that it imported them to know. His wife set her eyes upon him uneasily. They had a burning question of a burial-ground on hand at Cambourne just then themselves, and Mr. Midas was apt to lose his temper about it.

"The bishop has a name that he is wise," said Mr. Denys. "The bishop knows that the world has a future, and that the Church will stand the firmer for enlarging her foundations. He will not be sorry to hear that we have found a way of peace to the grave with Dissenters."

"What is it—your way of peace?" Mrs. Midas inquired, anxious and disturbed, but smiling with her lips.

"It is nothing but enclosing the whole burial-ground with one wall, and separating by a double line of trees an acre of it for our neighbours who do not come to church. The bishop and his clergy can march on the inner side of the trees when they read the consecration service; and the next day the minister of Salem can come with his congregation and bless their lot. Clarges has no objections, and I have none."

"I suppose those are what you call Liberal notions, and you are going to stand for the county?" Mr. Midas suggested with a covert sneer.

Mr. Denys laughed: "I call them truly Conservative notions. It is you who are the subverters, who use your party flag for a cloak of maliciousness," retorted he, and disclaimed all ambition of standing for the county.

Delia did not see why he should disclaim it, and Mrs. Midas asked her husband if there was any reason why he should not come forward himself. Mr. Midas growled that a contest was expensive, and the issue doubtful: "But it is my intention to give a burial-ground to Cambourne eventually—eventually," he announced with nervous emphasis as Sir Thomas Britton came up with Mr. Clarges.

"People cannot wait to be buried eventually, they must be buried when they die; and in the

meanwhile it is a long way to carry a corpse to Marshleas," the old fox-hunter objected.

The Cambourne grievance was likely to become a burden and tax upon himself. Marshleas Church was the mother church of the peninsula, and the separate parishes had ancient rights of burial there, which, after being allowed to lapse for many years, were being re-claimed by Cambourne under the necessity of wider room for the new population—a measure which was causing extraordinary feeling and disturbance.

Mr. Clarges tenderly turned the conversation : "If the last news be true, there will be no contest for the county—Mr. James Herrick of Knowle has consented to be put in nomination," he said cheerfully.

"Politics again," murmured Mrs. Midas, and moved a step onwards, inviting Mrs. Denys to follow. "I don't care for public affairs unless

my husband is interested, and I fancy that he has no chance of being county member," she said, and sighed, avowing that she would enjoy the dignity of county member's wife immensely.

Mrs. Denys was silent. She coloured softly, remembering and reflecting. Mr. James Herrick had represented Newbury for nine years, and was a man of mark in the House of Commons. His wife had once complained to her Cousin Delia that when Parliament was sitting she saw nothing of Jem. She judged Delia to be the more fortunate woman because her husband need never be absent. "And you have a son—I have none but girls," pretty Fanny lamented. The days were long gone by, and grown dim in memory, when her Cousin Fanny denied to Delia the company of Mr. Denys to dinner at Knowle. They did not stay in each other's houses, but they

were perfect friends, and met in London, at Navestock rectory, and more rarely at Danesmore, with entire satisfaction and cordiality.

Towards five o'clock the company in the Dutch garden received several accessions. Lady Herrick arrived with one of her granddaughters, and proudly confirmed Mr. Clarges' information, which, indeed, he had from Sir John.

"This is Clara, James' second girl," said she, presenting her to Mrs. Denys; and Clara looked up with a pair of blue eyes as brightly shy as her mother's at the same blushing age. Hugh Oliver was inquired for, but was not forthcoming. Marie-Irene was proposed instead, but the little girl said quietly that she would stay with grandmamma.

Mrs. Essex-Brough appeared by herself, leaving her husband reluctantly.

Mrs. Midas met her with her customary

flutter: "You have escaped for a while! How jaded you look—how I do pity you!" cried the lively young lady. "What should I do if I were in your place?"

"Your duty, I hope," said Miss Nancy Clarges with a kind seriousness, hearing her, and intervening.

"Don't pity me; my husband made me come. I carry him back a little talk," Mrs. Essex-Brough answered, and accepted Miss Nancy's proffered company. Her faithfulness in trouble was a support that even Mrs. Essex-Brough was fond of.

Mrs. Consett came, and sauntered here and there with Cousin Elizabeth Paul, glad of a respite from the noise of her houseful of children, and a glimpse of the gay world that she had lived in once. Cousin Elizabeth Paul observed with a touch of pathos how every year they missed some of the faces familiar

in former seasons. Duchess Adela would never appear there any more, and Mr. Wilton had finally departed, not waiting to see the church finished, or the last stone laid of the beautiful Green Square. But if some of the familiar faces had left the scene, others had come on. The strangers at Cote this summer of sufficient consequence to be received at the Manor House were unusually numerous, and amongst them were foreigners of royal dignity and world-wide fame, to whom this English village by the sea was an earthly paradise. But more interesting to the *habitués* was Captain Meade, whose name was inscribed on the national roll of heroes, and whose story promised to be distinguished for other episodes besides that which had won him the Cross of Valour. There he was, a sun-baked soldier, with an ugly sword-cut across his right cheek and severing the eye-brow, the reputed owner

of Navestock New Place, and inquisitively noticed in his assiduous attendance upon a young lady in a white gown and blue ribbons —a beautiful young lady evidently at home, and happy there, but never introduced to the casual, chance guests of the season.

"Who is she?" one asked, much admiring her as the two passed at a little distance under the trees.

The query was addressed to Mrs. Moth. "Nobody," said that lady, and her countenance was forbidding.

Captain Meade looked down into the charming face, and Marie-Irene looked up like sweet May, answering to a question put as much in sport as in curiosity: "Tom Rose—do you remember Tom Rose? He is staying with us. Hugh Oliver and he are gone out sailing. They don't care for afternoons in a garden. You will see them presently."

But Tom Rose and Hugh Oliver did not appear until the company had departed, and the lawns and alleys were left to the shades of evening and silence, and the thronging of winged creatures that haunt the summer twilight.

CHAPTER XLI.

YOUNG PEOPLE.

"I have often thought what a melancholy world this would be without children, and what an inhuman world without the aged."

COLERIDGE.

WITH Hugh Oliver Denys and Tom Rose went sailing every day of the warm August weather two or three young Consetts, boys home from school for their holidays as Hugh Oliver was at home. Captain Meade passed imperceptibly into treating them as all boys together, and Tom Rose as the greatest boy of any—"a regular wild shaver," as Todd the boatman called him when he was let loose on the water. His wonderful genius, unless for mischief, was quite in abeyance.

Captain Meade found Cote agree with him, and took up his quarters for an indefinite period at the old thatched inn, opposite the old original library and bazaar, which still enjoyed a large measure of public favour under the new order of things. Occasionally he sat for an hour of an evening with Mrs. Consett. Major Consett had fallen in that famous fight where Captain Meade got his sword-cut across the face, and in the brief, swift moments of ebbing life was able to whisper a few words to his friend and brother-in-arms: "You will let Kitty know—my poor Kitty, my poor children. God help her—there are so many of them."

There were so many of them. Captain Meade was some time in mastering correctly their names and ages. The boys came first, in close succession, and five in all; then came Olivia, Helen, and Kitty the less, who, to the

privilege of being the youngest, added the further privilege of a likeness to her mother, who was called the prettiest woman in the regiment when she joined it as Lieutenant Consett's newly-married wife. And she was pretty still as his widow, and would be pretty as long as she lived, for her countenance was lovely, and her heart warm, tender, trustful, and peaceful.

Mrs. Consett found the world full of good people who were all glad to be kind to her. When she came to Cote in her new mourning, the bearer of a letter of introduction from Captain Meade, and was granted a lease of a spacious, shabby, picturesque cottage under Mr. Denys, that gentleman felt no delicacy in directing her to supply her family — so numerous and so small—with fruit and vegetables from the kitchen-garden at the Manor House, and she felt no delicacy in obeying

his directions, for she needed kindness, and her cottage had no kitchen-garden belonging to it. Afterwards, when she took Hugh Oliver to teach with her own flock, she became one of Mrs. Denys' dearest intimates, and the same relations were continued when Hugh Oliver passed out of the hands of the women, and went to Rugby. Marie-Irene profited by association with the little girls in the intervals when she emerged from her convent; and since she had come home for good, the intercourse between the two houses, which was almost daily, had been established on an easy footing that made Captain Meade many quiet, unexpected opportunities of improving her sweet acquaintance.

Mr. Denys knew of these meetings, consented to them, and was glad.

It was Mrs. Consett's summer morning custom to take a thoughtful stroll after break-

fast under the deep verandah before sitting down to the day's work. It refreshed her spirits and cheered her heart. The cottage had grown with the growth of some former family, and was wonderfully pretty in its old age. Here a gay canariensis decked the myrtle-green of the walls with a cloud of yellow butterflies: there a scarlet tropoleum sported up to the thatch, and peeped in at a dormer window. Roses foamed over the verandah, and jessamine and clematis were preparing a later show and sweetness. All the house was fragrant as a nosegay, and clean as wax, but sadly worn and faded. Mrs. Consett's eye was accustomed to it. She let the boys and girls go in and out of the French windows which stood open the day long. With eight of her own and two or three of other people's, it was impossible to enforce the minor tidiness of life. But some

consolatory reflection always attended on this lady's trials. She found much to be thankful for in that the children enjoyed their health—a consideration that seemed more important than the partial absence of pattern from the parlour carpet, or the total absence of carpet from the stair.

On a certain clear, warm morning the whole brood had scattered themselves in pursuit of amusement. The boys had probably gone to the shore. The girls had certainly wandered off into the green field that adjoined the garden, for their mother saw the white cotton bonnet of Kitty the less going along by the hedge where primroses were profuse in spring, and her sisters were not likely to be far off though they were not in sight. She took a few turns more, and stopped—surely that was her child's voice in keen distress? Yes. There came Kitty, running and stumbling,

loudly, bitterly crying, carrying a load that was too much for her, all her little white petticoats smirched with mire, and her pinafore red and wet with fresh blood.

"Oh, my pet! she has surely fallen! she has hurt herself!" her mother said, and hastened to the rescue.

It was Kitty's tender heart that was hurt. Mr. Swift, passing along the road, had heard her cry, and was there as soon as her mother. When Kitty saw help coming, she plumped softly down on the grass, and uncuddled her burden with a new outburst of tears: "Oh, my Comfy, my Comfy, that I love so!" was her pitiful cry. The doctor stooped to see. It was Kitty's pussy, which had met the sad fate of marauders. Her eyes were glazing, she was warm yet. Kitty laid her face down on the soft fur, and refused to be separated from her pussy.

Just then appeared advancing up the field, from the opposite direction, Mr. Denys and Hugh Oliver. Everybody was sorry for Kitty's bereavement. Hugh Oliver sat on his heels beside her, and stroked pussy's coat—a kindness and sympathy that went to the child's heart. She tried to tell him about it—how Comfy was missing at breakfast-time, and she had gone to seek her—but broke down with more tears, more sobs. Kitty was seven years old, and this was a grief indeed.

"She's gone where good pussies go," said Mr. Denys. "Hugh Oliver shall write her elegy."

Kitty's sisters stood near, glistening in unison. The children were left to console one another, and were presently seen superintending a grave. When pussy's obsequies were ended, Hugh Oliver kissed Kitty to staunch her tears, and Helen led her into the house to

put on clean apparel. Hugh Oliver then joined his father in Mrs. Consett's parlour, where they were talking business.

Mr. Denys had fallen into the way of being a helpful adviser of the widow with many sons, and had come bringing favourable news from Mr. Gooden for the eldest, who would have liked of all things to be a squire, but failing that, for want of land of his own, had determined to be the next best thing—a farmer of somebody else's land. Mr. Denys had negotiated the lad's going to his own principal tenant for a year or two's instruction, and Mrs. Consett was feeling very happy in the assurance that Charlie's future was being well prepared for. Their talk was nearly over when Hugh Oliver presented himself, and was asked what he had done with Kitty. He gave his touching account, and as his father and he were about leaving, Kitty came in to tell her

story, looking like a white flower with the dew not shaken from it yet. She stood by Mr. Denys with the fearless frankness of a child accustomed to indulgence, and he seemed to listen to her with a pathetic delight. Mrs. Consett thought he was being reminded of his own little girls whom he had lost. When he lifted Kitty on his knee, she sighed the last sigh of her exhausted sorrow, leaning against his breast. It was over, and she was tired of it—open to consolation and new loves after the manner of her age. Mr. Denys mentioned some furry favourites of his own at home, and proposed that Kitty should come to the Manor House and make friends with them.

"There's no time like the present," he said to her mother. "Hughie and I are going across the Green Square, and may stop a few minutes at the church, but Kitty shall not be tired. She shall have her dinner at one

o'clock, and Marie-Irene shall bring her back in the afternoon."

Mrs. Consett was sure the child would be safe, and Mr. Denys led her off just as she was—in her cotton bonnet and frilled slip over her frock, a pretty picture of a little country girl any way and every way. Kitty was pleased to go, and in the simplicity of her heart made no ado, but entered into interesting conversation with both her companions on the road. They were also themselves the cause of conversation, then and afterwards.

It was the time of morning when all the world was out-of-doors, expatiating in the sunshine and sea-air—the people who lived at Cote, the people who were there for the season, and the people who had come only to spend the day—shoals of these last, of every degree, in every variety of costume. There had been rain the night before, and when Mr. Denys

turned into the Green Square with his son and little Kitty Consett, its aspect was extraordinarily bright, animated, and fresh. Strangers were apt to be charmed with the Green Square at Cote beyond anything they found at Marshleas or Cambourne. It had a breadth of shadow on the north side, which was a busy market-scene for a couple of hours before noon. Buying and selling were going on with vivacity now in front of the open stalls, and on the edge of the flags, where women who sold butter and fresh eggs, vegetables and fruit, sat at the receipt of custom. In the distance, under one of the great isolated trees, Mr. Denys descried Mr. Clarges and Mr. Orme, the centre of a group of gentlemen and workmen, viewing the church tower, from which the scaffolding had been removed since yesterday, and went straight across to them in the blinding sun.

Old Crump, who was on the skirts of the crowd, spoke to the squire as he passed, and followed the boy with his eyes. He had a great favour and affection for Hugh Oliver, who always used him with civility.

"It is a noble church, and crowns the Green Square, Mr. Denys," the rector said, and seemed in high good-humour.

"And now for the bells," added Mr. Orme valiantly.

"You must wait for the bells till my son is married. You shall have the bells to ring at my son's wedding," Mr. Denys answered in the same voice.

Hugh Oliver stood by, a bluff school-boy, ruddy and brown, showing his white teeth in a rare laugh, and holding little Kitty Consett by the hand.

The rector said well that the church was a noble church, and crowned the Green Square.

It wanted nothing now that the great tower dominated it, looking over all to the sea, a landmark for all the country round. The lime-trees that were young when the Green Square was a swampy field were a thick screen of leafy coolness now. The solid, tall houses built where Moffatt's Corner had been done away, rose against the blue sky with peaked gables, irregular roof-lines, and many-formed chimney-stacks. All the houses on the place showed an amiable rivalry in their adornment. Some were wreathed to the topmost cornice with florid garniture of ivy, green, golden and silver. Some had traced their window-lines with roses, and draped them with curtains of clematis, purple, blue, and fragrant white. Some waited for their chief glory until the early frosts made the Virginian creeper burn red as scarlet and fire upon the walls. Anything would grow that was planted and kindly

cared for. The myrtle covered the stones like a mantle of velvet sown with pearls; the magnolia blossomed abundantly in seasons of steady, prolonged heat; and the Spanish jessamine revealed its stars in every warm, southern nook. The people who took pains with their houses were aware that Mrs. Denys was gratified; and they had their reward in the beauty and pleasantness of the place, in the admiration it excited, and the favour it brought them. Cote was said now to be as full as it would hold, and indeed the lively stir that morning, the air of bustle and business, bore out the assertion, and sustained the boast. And all this, as Crump said, at no cost but of a little thought, and work in overtime.

Mr. Denys did not halt long to contemplate the church tower. "The finest effect is in the evening. Your mother will like to come at sunset," he said to Hugh Oliver as they walked on.

"This is the night the band plays," the boy objected.

"We will not mind that, for once. The evening will be very soft and beautiful after this hot day. To-morrow we must go to Navestock."

Kitty did not flag at all, but her face was very rosy when Mr. Denys presented her before his wife in her morning-room, where she was busy with her letters, and affairs of business, as her custom was at that hour. She turned her head without rising, but was kind and gracious enough when she saw her little visitor. Everybody was fond of Kitty.

"I have brought you company, Delia. Make much of her, for she has been in sad trouble to-day," Mr. Denys said. "Where is Marie-Irene, and where is Muff?"

Muff looked round from the window-sill where she was sunning herself — a white

Persian cat with torquoise-blue eyes, and evidently not deaf as prejudiced witnesses love to aver that blue-eyed, white Persian cats are.

Marie-Irene was in the garden with a book. Hugh Oliver took Kitty and went in quest of her, Muff courteously attending them, and returning when they were called to dinner.

Dinner over, there was a tour of inspection, conducted by the squire himself, all round the premises, wherever there was any creature, gamesome or young, that Kitty might be pleased to have an introduction to—ball-like puppies, a calf with spikes on its nose, a foal with frail, long legs, cocks and hens, ducks, turkeys. Mrs. Brice, looking out from the still-room window, saw the master pass, carrying the child through the imminent numerous perils of the poultry-yard. "Poor master! just so I've seen him carry his own little girls, many's the time," she said.

Mrs. Denys and Marie-Irene, in vast, slouched straw hats, were of the party, and the carriage came to the door for their afternoon drive before the inspection was finished. That brought it to an end, however, and Kitty's mourning comforts were wound up by her conveyance home with a kitten of Muff's lineage in her lap, and a basket of strawberries for her mother.

"And has my pet been happy — very happy?" Mrs. Consett tenderly inquired. Kitty had been so happy that words could not utter it. Nevertheless, the first thing she did was to go and sit by Comfy's grave, and promise never, never to forget her.

CHAPTER XLII.

SOME LAST WORDS.

"I have too grieved a heart
To take a tedious leave."

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN the carriage drove away that bore Kitty Consett home, Mr. Denys walked into the village, and went down to the Glen House. The new house had never attained to the bowery perfections of the old one which had so many links with Mr. Denys' memory, but the gardens were little altered, and the hollow walk under the beech-trees was always the same—soft under foot and shady over head, a delightful walk for an invalid who shivers on any but the warmest days. And this was now Mr. Essex-Brough's melancholy case. He

was holding his wife's arm, and travelling slowly up and down, resting often, when Mr. Denys appeared in sight, and looked along the green alley to discover whether they were there.

"Here is Mr. Denys, come to relieve you for an hour, Chattie," he said.

"I wish you would not fancy that I am tired when I am not tired," was his wife's answer. "Am I a woman to want a dance when my husband is lying ill in the next room?"

No. Let motives alone — they are mixed and inscrutable often. Mrs. Essex-Brough was a good wife as she was a good neighbour, the more serviceable as there was the more need of it. Her husband had been a pitiable sufferer at intervals since before their marriage, and a heavy cloud that he had passed under lately had developed his malady, of which the fatal issue was predicted at no very long date.

He had not many people to come to see him, but Mr. Denys, when he was at Cote, never failed him for a day.

"So you are going to Navestock to-morrow —are you going for any length of time?" the sick man inquired.

"I shall be at the Manor House again within the week. Delia goes with me, and never stays willingly longer than she must."

"I shall last the week, I hope."

"I would not leave if the end were likely to be so soon. Swift gives you a month or two," Mr. Denys said with great concern.

"Swift is a good fellow. But I would not have you stay for me—I might keep you waiting till you lost patience."

"Don't say that. Mr. Denys has never forgotten to be kind," the sick man's wife remonstrated.

"And there is one other person who has

never forgotten to be kind, Chattie," he said with a touch of compunction. "Let us go indoors. It begins to be chill when the sun gets round behind the fir-trees at the back of the house."

Mr. Essex-Brough had done worse things in his time than circulate that lie with a circumstance to serve a friend which had been his final discomfiture. Shielded by the strong defence of money, he had gone on with impunity in the perverse ways he loved, fearing no check and meeting none, until that day which the fates hold in reserve for men who tempt their luck too long. That day brought him face to face with a person of no account in the world, unless by force and weight of character, an inconvenient witness in a matter where his friend wanted backing, and when, at the critical moment, he applied the lever of a lie to destroy the value of testimony by

destroying first the credit of a good name, he raised what he could not support, and what in falling to the ground fell upon and crushed himself. He had to answer to the law for his venturesome use of bad expedients, and few compassionated his misfortune. He was furiously angry, and could never resist talking of it, but he was not ashamed. To the last he was consistent, and boldly maintained the principle that a gentleman must play fair with his equals, but may ride over the rest of the world as he pleases, and no harm to his honour.

"There is a great deal of vapouring about what a gentleman will do, and what a gentleman will not do. Look round you, Denys, and tell me, where is the perfect man?" he said today. "Is Midas ideally honest? Does old Boreas seek no private ends? More act by my principle than avow it. Niggers and low fellows understand it as well as we. Clarges

acquiesces in it with the pious cynicism of all well-off and well-bred men of his school. It is the political principle that governs half the world."

Mr. Denys did not care to enter into the argument. He knew that it was the principle which had formerly guided himself whenever his might came into collision with the right of weaker folk. But he had kept always on the safe side of the law. And he had learnt since a better way.

Mr. Essex-Brough continued his self-exculpation: "I had no malice against the individual. I meant him no personal injury in writing that he was a sort of lunatic. I wanted to carry our case, and that was only a strong way of putting my opinion, that it is madness for a man to fly in the face of his squire. The fact is, I did not know him, or I should have let him alone. You cleared the Blythes out of

the Orchard for nothing else, Denys. And quite right too."

"Would to God that I could bring them back," Mr. Denys said forcibly.

Mrs. Essex-Brough mentioned that Richard Blythe had been in Cote several times lately. "He is here to-day," she said. "I met him as I was riding up to the down this morning before breakfast."

"I had not heard of it. Why is he here?" Mr. Denys was evidently taken by surprise.

"He made no sign—and yet I think he must have known me," the lady replied.

There was a sudden cessation of talk. Mr Denys' air was grave and pre-occupied, as if some urgent thought had presented itself to him at the moment. When he got up to go, and had shaken hands with his condemned friend once, he returned from the door again to repeat his good-byes.

"In case you see me no more?" Mr. Essex-Brough said with a grim smile.

"In case you see *me* no more," Mr. Denys answered. "As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between any of us and death!"

A quarter of an hour after the squire was gone, Mr. Essex-Brough said to his wife: "What did Denys mean, Chattie—'As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between any of us and death?'"

"He was speaking out of the Bible. I don't know what he meant," was her reply; but she had been considering it too.

An unexpected concurrence of events had suddenly brought up before Mr. Denys' mind some spectres of the past. Was he afraid of them? He testified no fear, and would have confessed to none, but he went straight home from the Glen House, and did a thing that it

had been long his intention to do, but which he had delayed from a natural reluctance to act as in anticipation of death, when there was no threatening of death unless in his secret consciousness. He wrote several letters which he consigned to a locked drawer of his writing-table—Delia would have the key in the event that he was preparing for. Then he turned to the destroying of letters—destroying some with a cruel pain of remembrance, no doubt; but having begun the task, he did not linger over it. His Cousin Ralph was his own master again, and he was going to Navestock to-morrow—his peril none the less because experts had decreed poor Ralph recovered of his lunacy. And Richard Blythe was back at Cote—had been at Cote several times lately. *Why?* Mr. Denys had heard of what was called his *rancour* when he went away, and he had heard nothing of him since. This was

first in his recollection, therefore—not that he believed much of Richard's rancour (it was not like the man), but his re-appearance on the scene of his griefs at the moment when Ralph Denys was free again to prosecute his revenges, did give an impetus to the dormant superstition in his mind—if that may be called superstition which was really faith in the working out of law, and a foresight of probable consequences. When his wife and Marie-Irene returned from their drive, Delia sought her husband there—in his private room, where he was commonly to be found at that hour, and found him still busy. The saddest part of his duty was completed, but it was not all done. The drawers of his escritoire were open, but some had yet to disgorge their contents, and the contents of others were strewn on the floor and on the tables.

"What are you doing, Hugh? What are

these old papers lying all over the place?" his wife asked, looking about.

"Letters. I have been sorting them, and putting in order what are necessary to be kept. They are not many. Those may be burned." He gathered up an armful, cast them into the fire-grate, struck a match, and set them alight there and then—not the first batch by the ashes on the hearth. "It gives no end of pain and trouble to look through a man's papers after he is gone. I will not leave you that bad legacy, Delia. These are family letters—of no interest any more." He spoke with studied indifference.

Delia stood with a doubtful aspect, watching their destruction. "I save very few letters," she said musingly.

"That is the best way. Answer them, if they want answering, and have done with them."

"Yours and my boy's, and a few more."

"Amongst these were mine to my mother when I was Hughie's age—letters from school chiefly."

Delia picked up a charred page that had fallen between the bars. It was nothing—a blank page. She seemed disappointed: "I should have liked to read those letters of yours from Rugby. Are they all burnt?" she inquired.

"Yes, I believe so. They were not worth reading. Look here." Mr. Denys held out to her as he spoke an oval miniature, not very well painted, and set only in a rim of tarnished metal.

"Who is it? Can it possibly be *you?*" Delia said, smiling over it with a very real and good-humoured amusement.

It was the portrait of a sturdy little boy in a white frock and red sash and shoulder-knots, with fair hair cut straight across his forehead,

and great blue eyes full of vivacity—a mother's darling one day, no doubt.

"It is like you yet," Delia said again. "I shall take possession of it."

Mr. Denys held another miniature in his hand, from which he glanced once or twice at his wife as she was speaking. "Take this," he said at last. "I am rather jealous of your remembrance."

Delia's beautiful blush and the sudden brightness of her eyes announced her pride and delight in the gift which her husband presented with his short, "Take this." It was a likeness of himself, excellent, admirable, by a great artist who had known his sitter intimately since they were both young men.

"I was keeping it in reserve until to-morrow, our wedding-day," Mr. Denys said.

"And this is our wedding-eve! I did not think when I was so miserable all that while

ago that I could ever be so quiet and contented as I am. Oh, my dear, you have been very good to me," Delia answered, and came near to thank him.

"Better than you expected, eh?" he said, looking in her face. "Tell them so when I am gone. They were hard upon me, but you were stout-hearted, and faithful, and tender. God bless you, my wife, for the years I have been happy with you!"

"God make them many more, dear Hugh, I pray."

If Delia dissolved in tears at this it was because she thought of the sorrows they had lived through together as well as of the joys. But there seemed a truce to sorrows at this time. All was going well at Cote, and there was a peep of light on the horizon where Mr. Denys looked for the rising of that star of his hopes, which he expected to culminate at New Place.

Captain Meade dined at the Manor House this evening, and Marie-Irene put on a white gown that somebody had said became her exceedingly—a white gown with much cloudy softness of lace about it, and garnet-coloured roses in her hair that Captain Meade had brought her from Mrs. Consett's garden. There were signs that the young lady began to care for the hero's approval, and as they walked across the Green Square, following in the wake of Mr. and Mrs. Denys, to view the church tower at sunset, it was remarked that they had a little the air of lovers.

A great many people were out besides the party from the Manor House. A few were out with the same object as themselves—to view the tower finished and unveiled—but more because it was the custom on a fine summer evening to assemble in the Green Square when the band of native talent performed a selection

of music. All ranks and conditions of men were represented, work folk, trades folk, gentle folk, and all taking their pleasure. It was the custom to keep the shops open also, and to light them up where there were pretty things to sell; and though business was considered over at seven o'clock, the shopkeepers sat before their own doors, ready to improve the hour if there was any call, and enjoying their lawful rest after the fatigues of the day if there was none.

"It is very gay and amusing: it is as new to me as to you," Marie-Irene said to her companion.

They were passing in front of the centre house on the south side of the square, the new inn, a picturesque and capacious building, with hooded balconies and a garden before it, where a party of young people, incited by the music, had got up an impromptu dance. They sang,

as they danced, *tira-la-la* to the tune. It was a pretty incident, which a group of common folk were standing to admire. Mr. and Mrs. Denys halted for a minute like the rest, then paced gently on, contemplating the great white tower in the distance, and exchanging frequent recognitions with neighbours in frieze and fustian, and recognitions scarcely less frequent with other neighbours in broadcloth and silk.

It was Mrs. Denys' pride to say that she knew every face by sight belonging to Cote, and that her speaking acquaintance was nearly as extensive. She was greatly beloved and revered, a most beautiful lady still, but statelier than when she came first amongst the people, and with an expression of countenance very sweetly patient, which they said she had never lost since her little younger son died. The squire's way of pulling off the soft grey hat that was his country-wear was peculiar to him-

self. He might have been going to throw it down, but back on his head it went again with the same quick automatic action. For the instant that he was uncovered, his face was lifted up, and he looked full at the person he was greeting. Just so he looked at Richard Blythe, who, advancing from the opposite direction, reached the steps leading up to the churchyard as he did, and stood back rendering him the homage customary still from cottager to squire amongst peasants of the shepherd's type—the old-fashioned homage of self-respect and rustic good manners. Mr. and Mrs. Denys went up the steps, Delia with downcast face, saddened by the recollections that the unexpected meeting brought to mind, and her husband not quite unshaken, though he was in a measure prepared for it.

"Blythe looks well. He has prospered since he went away," Mr. Denys remarked in

a low voice, but cheerful enough; for, indeed, the man's appearance was a relief and satisfaction to him.

"Yes. He would be likely to prosper anywhere, keeping his health," Delia replied in the same tone, suppressing a sigh.

They walked round to the north-west of the church where the splendid glow and flush of sunset lay over the inland country seen for miles and miles away. The churchyard had been planted when the building was begun, and the young trees, straight-grown and full of summer leaf, gave promise of a grand maturity. The enclosure wall was low enough for a seat here, where the ground fell abruptly on the outside, and two or three strangers had found their way in for a quiet hour before the night. Mr. and Mrs. Denys sat down to rest, and wait for their young people, who had loitered, talking, meanwhile, as intimate, dear

friends talk of a work that is to outlive them.

The church was called of Mr. Denys' building. It was built to stand for ages, of stone imperishable, and was glorious for its strength rather than lovely for any beauty or grace of exterior ornament. The foundations were laid deep, as the old companies of freemasons laid the foundations of the ancient churches; and the tower, octagonal in form and buttressed hugely, rose in a noble lantern high over the bell-chamber, ready and waiting for the bells that were not to ring till the founder's son was wedded. The warm reflections of the declining sun cast a veil of soft light and delicate colour about the pale, bare walls.

"A very few years, and they will have a permanent covering," Mr. Denys said in answer to an observation from his wife. "This stone takes kindly to the multiplied touches

of time and weather. We have not carved the great south porch to let the all-devouring ivy overgrow it, but the base of the tower may have a garment if you please. As for the roof, it will soon in this moist climate acquire the dusky richness of velvet, with lichen-embroidery like gold."

"The church is perfect in form and proportion, Hugh. And you say that a thousand people will not fill it?"

"A thousand people will not nearly fill it."

"I think I am most of all glad that you have given the people this beautiful ground to be buried in under its shadow. It seems a place made for peaceful thoughts. If I were poor, and lived where the houses are thick, this should be my garden, to come and be still for a little in a day. And I hope they will let the church door be open."

"It was at your instance I gave this ground,

Delia. Now that it is done, I feel that it was a duty not to be taken out of my hands. I'll tell Clarges there must be a daily service."

"Oh, yes. A morning service, and an evening service in the middle of the week. Mr. Orme is strong enough and willing enough for all—if only we are allowed to keep him."

"We shall keep him if the rector get promotion, not otherwise. There is a canonry at Beauminster likely to be vacant soon, and Clarges expects it. Then he would resign Cote, and Orme should have the living."

"Here is Blythe coming round the north side of the church, Hugh—shall we move?" Delia asked hastily.

"No, better not. Why should I avoid him? If the man wants to speak to me, let him speak," Mr. Denys said. It appeared that Richard Blythe did want to speak to the squire, for he came straight to where he was;

and Mr. Denys, when he saw his object, stood up and advanced a step to meet him.

"Squire," he said, "I've thought that I should like to have a word with you before I go across the seas. I'm here to take a last look round the old place. The ship sails from Plymouth next Monday."

"You are emigrating then, Blythe?" Mr. Denys said, regarding him steadfastly.

"Yes, sir. I am one of three hundred for Auckland, that there's not room for at home."

Mrs. Denys was looking up at the shepherd with the kindliest sympathy. "Then you have struck root nowhere else since you left Cote, Blythe?" she said.

"No, ma'am, nor ever shall, I think. I've been in Scotland shepherding, and on the borders of Wales, and I've been on the Yorkshire wolds and the Sussex downs, but I've never framed to settle in any spot yet. They

say the sap rises stronger in a man when he has been cut down with troubles, if he can go clean away to a new country."

"You will get a grant of land out there, and be your own master," Mr. Denys interposed.

"I shall, sir. Not that I think so much of being my own master as some do. I've taken wage since the day I was able to do a hand's turn. But the land is free there, and for a man to have a homestead of his own, where no lord can come in and give him notice to quit, is a fine thing. There were Blythes at Cote before ever Denyses was heard of, squire—you ask the old parson to show you in the register if I'm not right."

"I know you are right, Blythe, without asking the parson. I wish there were Blythes at Cote still. It was a blunder to let you go. There was no better stock in the place."

"Then you are sorry, squire? I've had

a terrible sore feeling sometimes that you'd ridden over us rough-shod, and didn't care what harm you'd done. I shall go away the lighter for leaving it behind me. That's partly why I'm here to-day. Cousin Phœbe has wrote more than once that the master was sorry, she was sure, and that the lady had put a stone upon our grave. For which I thought I'd like to thank her." Blythe's thanks were silent—given with a prayer and a blessing; and Mrs. Denys also bent her head for a minute or two.

"Where is your brother, Blythe—Jack, who went to Spain with the engineers?" the squire asked, breaking the pause.

"Jack is bound for Auckland too, sir."

"Is he in Cote with you now?"

"No, sir." Blythe's negative sounded curt, perhaps because he could add nothing to soften it. Jack had refused to come to Cote.

He had shaken the dust off his feet against the place whence the owner of the soil had driven them.

In the distance, sauntering that way, appeared Captain Meade and the graceful, white figure of Marie-Irene. "Here they come," Mr. Denys whispered to his wife. Delia turned to look at them, and Blythe turned too, recognising the beautiful girl who used to visit the Orchard with Phœbe when she was a child.

"I'll wish you a good-bye, squire and madam," he said then; "and thank you kindly, ma'am, for what you've done since I saw you last. I met your son in the road one day, squire — he didn't know me, and it was as well. The young lady might remember. Good-bye, squire—good-bye, madam."

They did not offer to delay him, but Marie-Irene was quick-eyed, and remembered the

shepherd perfectly, and she remembered too the walk with her father to the Orchard after the eviction of the Blythes, and the words of his confession that had struck her as so sadly strange. She did not speak, she only watched the man's receding figure until he turned the corner of the church, and was out of sight. Captain Meade seemed struck by him, and asked who he was.

"A former tenant of mine, on his road to Plymouth, to join an emigrant ship sailing for Auckland next Monday," Mr. Denys answered.

"A fine fellow. He would have made a soldier. He has the stuff in him for a successful emigrant too, but it is a pity that the pick of the peasantry should find more inducement to go away than to stop in the country."

There was no rejoinder to Captain Meade's remark, and the subject dropped.

When Richard Blythe went down the steps

into the Green Square again, the band was still playing, the people were still walking about, and the dancers were still dancing on the lawn before the inn. But the twilight was deepening, and he reflected within himself that it was a late hour to go to the rectory. He had had his word with the squire, and he wanted a word with the parson too: "Just to leave all friends at home," he said, knowing the sweetness of a memory clear of offences. Then he bethought him that often in former years he had met the rector strolling up to the old church in the cool of the summer evenings, and that perhaps he continued the practice. If so, he might meet him without going to his house. His conjecture proved correct. Mr. Clarges was just issuing from the lower gate of his garden, which opened on the church lane, as the shepherd drew near, and stopped with a perplexed, inquiring gaze towards him.

Blythe made his homage to the parson the same as to the squire.

"I heard you were in Cote, and I am glad to see you, Blythe," the clergyman said, and held out his hand.

Blythe took it, glad to be kindly met, and they walked together up the familiar road.

"The world seems to have used you fairly well since you forsook Cote," was the rector's next remark after a furtive slight survey of the man. "I take it you repented of your design to preach a crusade for equality, and judged it wiser to mind your sheep."

"No, sir, I've none repented yet," Blythe answered quietly. "I've minded my sheep, but come rough, come smooth, I've said my say for equality where and when I got the opening. I'm thinking, sir, perhaps you don't understand what we mean who want more equality?"

"I suppose you want to do away with distinctions of rank, to be rid of squires and parsons, of Church and Queen, and to have a re-distribution of other people's property—to level all down to yourselves, and set up a democratic paradise on the ruins of law and order."

"There may be thick-headed folks who credit that sort of stuff, sir, but you are not one of 'em," Blythe rejoined with a natural touch of scorn. "It is what you preach on Sundays we want, sir; more of the spirit of Christ in man's dealings with man. The Queen, God bless her, may she reign long, for she's a kind woman. The Church I was born in I'll uphold to my life's end, for if I know any good I got it there. There's squires better than Squire Denys, and squires worse, and I am not against the whole class because one did hardly by mine and me, any more than

I'm against all the parsons because you were a bit of a stumbling-block to us in our trouble. Squire Denys did not quite know what he did, and I've forgiven him. He has turned a new leaf since, and set a pattern at Navestock, and here too, sir, *here too*, that more will follow—and then you'll see sound progress, a sample of equality as fair as can be had until the land is made free; which God grant speedily, for the land's sake and the sake of us that live by it."

"What do you mean, Blythe, by the land being made *free?* Free for you to take, though the owner may wish to hold, eh?"

"I'll give you an example, sir. Is your land free—your land at Bourtree—or does a dead hand keep its grip on it for bairns not born yet?" There was a touch of derision in Blythe's query. The clergyman was a childless man, and his little estate at Bourtree was

entailed on heirs male. If he could have done what he liked with it, he would have sold it to leave the money to his wife, who was a devoted wife, and lapped him in the ease that his soul loved. But his hands were tied.

"I should not oppose a judicious alteration in the law of entail, Blythe," he said musingly.

"In the ship I sail by, there'll sail a hundred men of Kent, them and theirs ousted from home and country because they won't bend their necks to a yoke heavier than's fit. It is too much power, the power of exile, in the landlords' hands, sir."

"You strike at the very root of society, Blythe, if you interfere with a gentleman's right to turn out of his cottages tenants who will not work his land unless they may be servants on their own terms—servants and masters too."

"The root o' society has been struck at a good deal, sir, since I first heard tell on it, but it's had the heaviest jogs from the wind in its upper branches. It has bushed too much o' the one side, and when the wind gets up and blows hard it is likely to wreast at the roots a bit. Cut out the dead wood, and prune the big boughs into closer form, and it will stand fast and flourish yet. Its shadow spreads too wide, and the land that is starved o' sunshine won't grow nought as it should."

"You view everything through the distorted medium of your own misfortunes, Blythe," Mr. Clarges said mournfully.

"Are you sure it is distorted, sir? I've always thought experience cleared the vision. I've seen other places since I left Cote, and I've seen this: gentlemen with three or four great houses and estates in as many counties —too much for any child o' man to call his own

—and thousands and tens o' thousands delving the soil with not so much as to rest their foot. And I've seen gentlemen enlarge their borders by the short process of running up a fence to take in what served their poor neighbour for a field, and sit at quarter sessions after to sentence other men's stealings."

"That is true, Blythe, and sorry I am that it should be true."

"If I had my way I'd have Government limit the land one man may possess, and bid him divide or sell when that limit is touched. And I would have Government keep a sharper eye on landmarks, and a tighter hand on wastes everywhere, if it is only to give a Christian chance to men like me when men like Denys thrust us out."

"And you would still find influences prevailing strong and bold enough to defy the law that traversed the desires and interests

of richer men. If all squires were like the Herricks, Brittons, and Daventrys, there would be neither oppression nor extortion to complain of, but the law was never made yet that squires like the old Denyses, the Midases, and the Essex-Broughs cannot circumvent or loose when their will is that way set."

"And there'd still be parsons to excuse 'em, no doubt, sir."

Mr. Clarges sighed. "Blythe, you will not understand me," he said.

"Are you so deep, sir, that a man mayn't fathom you? I was angry once, but that's long over. You meant kindly in your way, only your way wasn't ours. I wouldn't advise a poor man to yield to wrong for fear of worse —I should give a very different name to what you call proper submission and humility. Gran'mother would ha' bitten her tongue out afore she'd ha' feigned the thing that was not,

or made believe to honour what she thought shame on. I hold with her, sir. I say now, as I said then, if, instead of bringing the squire's threatenings to us when that contention about the right o' way began, you had stood up to him like a man fearing God rather than him, there'd ha' been some chance of his stopping in his rough courses."

"No, Blythe, you are mistaken. There would have been none. Mr. Denys is too autocratic to hear remonstrance. I have always found him the same. When soft words do not turn away anger we must leave it to time, and commit our cause—if it be a good cause—to higher hands."

The clergyman enunciated his views with emphatic resignedness. The shepherd offered no rejoinder. They were come to the churchyard lying hushed and dim in the twilight, and they spoke of other things.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ONE DAY IN COTE.

"The bravest trophy ever man obtained
Is that which o'er himself, himself hath gained."
EARL OF STIRLING.

IT was splendid weather when Mr. and Mrs. Denys set out to go to Navestock the next day. As the squire drove through the Green Square, all the world of Cote was busy transacting their morning business and morning gossip, and such as were judges of horse-flesh, or aspired to the reputation of judges, dropped their own interests for a minute to descant on the spanking pair the gentleman sat behind. They reckoned it would take an hour and three-quarters to bring him to Navestock at that pace—or it might be ten minutes over.

Old Crump stood at the edge of the pavement near the inn, deeply pondering with Old Todd what was the portent of a certain thing that had happened in the town since last night. It was nothing but a notice posted here and there on the blank walls that next Saturday would be published the first issue of a weekly paper, to be styled *The Newsboy*.

"An unpretending title—a promise of late intelligence," Mr. Denys remarked, and pointed it out to his wife, who was of opinion that Cote could have done very well without it.

As the mail-phaeton dashed past, the old hats of Old Crump and Old Todd made obeisance, and they continued to gaze after the squire and his lady until the church corner was turned, and they were out of sight.

"I never see the match o' that lady for beauty and handsomeness yet, Crump," Old Todd said with the solemn air of a man who

makes a final statement and defies contradiction. "And she's good, real good; 'her price is above rubies, the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her'—that is about what she is. And a mother of sorrows too, eh?"

Old Crump bent his head in respectful acquiescence. "Do you reck'lect, Todd, the first Sunday ever squire brought her to church, when she fell asleep while the preaching was going on, and the poor little motherless lass, that is the young lady now, lying in her lap, fell asleep too? A picture it was, so loving and pretty."

"If I reck'lect? who doesn't that was there? My old woman at home never tires o' talking of 'em. If Denys has given her a sore heart sometimes since, it has been as my wife said—she's had the love in her that's proved a sov'ren heal-all. Ay, and it will last. She'll

do him good and not evil all the days of his life."

"They have not taken the boy to Navestock this morning. He is a noble boy yon," Crump said, indicating by a motion of the head towards the Manor House that he meant Hugh Oliver—young Denys.

"An uncommon fine, strong boy — favours both father and mother, but father most."

Todd replied. "And John and George was fine lads too—very fond I was o' George," he went on slowly, meditating as he talked. "It vexes me to think that Denys should ha' used their mother as he did—it was no marriage, nayther here nor anywhere else, they say now. We used to hear that the lady held herself as good a wife as any man's wife i' Cote, and being a stranger and a Catholic, we paid her that respect, and said she ought to know best. Only Widow Blythe was stubborn, and ordered

her boys not to touch their caps. She's gone, poor soul, and Richard and Jack starting for t'other side o' the world. We've seen changes, Mr. Crump, you and me."

"We have so, William Todd — but we was speaking of poor madam and the squire. I cannot undertake to explain it," Crump answered in an official tone, "but that they were married in the sight of God, I don't presume to doubt; for the squire said they was, and no wedded pair could be more kind and faithful. Still, he never pretended that the law of God was the same as the law by Act of Parliament, that makes a man's son heir to his land."

"It is hard on lads to come into the world without the law by Act o' Parliament, and by this time they've felt it, though what Denys could do to make amends, I believe he's done," Todd remarked.

"You may be sure of it, William Todd. The lady had a fortune of her own which the squire never touched any more than if it wasn't there; and she made a will, sharing it amongst her children. I like to have such things set on a plain footing; and that's true, for I was a witness, and heard it read. It was short, but all that was needed—the lawyer took care of that. The young gentlemen have had their share, and when the young lady is married she will not go empty-handed."

"If I am rightly informed she'll carry Navestock in her hand?" Todd said with a shrewd twinkle, and a pause, as waiting for a positive assurance. He got instead a blunt denial.

"No, that she won't — nor is it fit she should, William Todd. Navestock has found its master in a gentleman of the old, ancient family — in Captain Meade, Guy Francis Meade."

"You need not mention his name—we know his name, Mr. Crump; it's no mystery," Todd rejoined with a rather provoking coolness. "I've had many a chat with the gentleman out in my boat, and we hope that them who binds and looses will consider the price enough that's paid to buy off the curse."

Old Crump whitened about the mouth, and stared into the distance without offering any reply. Coming towards them under the shadow of the houses was a tall man, with a stick over his shoulder, and a blue bundle slung on it. Todd and the agent observed him at the same instant.

"It is Richard Blythe; poor fellow, his heart's like lead for thinking of what's before him, and well it may be," the boatman said. "I'd walk with him a mile on his road, but it is ten o'clock—time I was down on the shore if I am to get a hiring to-day. This is about

the hour gentlemen mostly come along that want boats."

Todd moved off, but Crump stood his ground until Blythe came up with him. They shook hands, and Crump inquired if he was going to foot it all the way. He said no, only as far as Marshleas, where he expected to meet a friend who was a carrier, and would give him a cast in his van to Beauminster.

"If you go by the van you will pass through Navestock. The squire and the lady have gone to Navestock this morning," the old agent told him. "They will be there only an hour or two before you."

"I have had my last word with the squire, and I am not sorry to have a last word with you, Mr. Crump, though I've not been to your house, sir." Crump looked hard at the shepherd, and chaffered with his lips, but did not speak. "I am going out of the country, as

you know, sir, and it is not likely we shall ever meet again. I expect to find Jack at Beauminster. We take the train at Plymouth on Sunday night, and the ship sails on Monday." Crump still gazed, and was silent. "There's not much to say, sir, but only this—if there's been a thorn in your pillow because of what was put on you to do against us at the Orchard, don't let it prick you longer. They're all dead and gone but Jack and me; and like grandmother, I'd fain say, before we go, that we're friends with everybody. Jack bears no malice, but he can't talk of what's past yet, and don't care to see the place where we was all happy together. So he's not come."

"Have you looked in at the Orchard this visit, Richard?" Crump now inquired. "I have heard of your being here before, though we have not happened to meet."

"I have looked in at the Orchard whenever I've been over," Blythe answered. "They have made quite a gentleman's place of it. I suppose that is what it must have come to if we'd been let stay on."

"Yes, Richard, that is what it must have come to *there*. Five-and-twenty pounds the acre the gentleman pays — his rent is a hundred and fifty pounds a year. That's a sum o' money. But it's a choice spot."

"I was glad to see they'd spared the fruit-trees. The gardener asked me to take a walk round. He is an intelligent man, and when he heard where I'm bound, he began to speak o' shrubs an' plants out there, and I'm to send him home some seeds and berries that he is curious about."

"And that will be a link, Richard," Crump said almost cheerfully. "We shall have tidings of a new Cote and a new Orchard, and a

new race of Blythes—Blythes are too good a stock to be let die."

"My heart was buried in Mary's grave, Mr. Crump. But Jack may marry, we'll hope. And now I'll bid you good-bye, sir; I must be going or the van might start and leave me behind." And with a long grasp of the hand they parted.

Old Crump's mind was relieved from a certain anxiety by this interview, much as Mr. Denys' mind had been relieved. It was as if a thunder-cloud had rolled away without a storm. Words had been said, and things had been done, to keep alive a feeling of hostility, and from time to time both the squire and the agent had been reminded of their former tyranny as if it were the present manner of their rule. The poor old lameter was glad of the late pardon. He turned to hobble off on his business with his two sticks,

and traversed the Green Square in the blazing sun, a sort of fossilised figure, often speculated on and wondered at by the modern generation. He came there every day—two or three times in every day. There was no place he liked so well from which to review his work. He retained his embowered, thatched cottage near the old church, and his salary of forty pounds a year with which he had been rich under the old order before it began to change, and he retained also the name of agent, but the toil of office was spared him. His successor let him believe that he was useful; and he was so, indeed. He kept his eye on the builders, that they adhered strictly to the squire's rules, and he kept an eye on the trees, and had lately planted four limes on the high road at a spot where a sweet shade was a boon that long survived him; and he gave advice to strangers on the culti-

vation and pruning of myrtles, which were so common on cottage-walls at Cote that a newsmonger from London writing of his travels had affronted everybody by describing them as box—when, if he had only asked the question, any child in the place could have told him better.

In these latter days Old Crump enjoyed a fair share of contentment. His clothing was still of the thriftiest, and his razor was not worn with extra service; habits kept their hold upon him, but as power dwindled his neighbours were more friendly, and the successful, sound progress of Cote was his continual feast. People thought it odd that Mr. Denys regarded the old man so much, but Mr. Denys never changed in his fidelity to his accustomed servants. He spoke to Crump first on many occasions yet, leaving him to pass his orders on to the executive. He had

done so this very morning, pulling up at his gate, and bringing him out bare-headed to receive certain instructions about the fixing of notice-boards to the public where walks through the fields were not rights of way.

"Strangers straggle three and four abreast through the growing corn, who ought to know better. They leave the gates open, and the cattle stray. Giles complains that his sheep are chased by boys with a dog. All that idle mischief must be stopped, or everybody's liberty of roaming in the fields and woods will have to be curtailed."

The squire was peremptory. Some of the beautiful green walks would have been closed at this time but for Mrs. Denys' intercession. She pleaded that the country was necessary to the comfort of visitors and the prosperity of the townsfolk, and that it was hard to punish all for the folly of a few. She had written out

the notices herself, and Crump was delighted with the precision of their terms. He was on his morning round now to give orders at the carpenter's shop for the construction of the boards and posts, and to deposit with the painter copies of the lady's handwriting.

The blast of a horn and the clatter of wheels made him stand and look back. It was the yellow break with four horses that belonged to the inn, chartered for the day by Captain Meade to give the young Consetts and their friends a treat. The vehicle was as full as it would cram. Captain Meade himself was in command, with Harry Consett for lieutenant blowing the horn from the box-seat, and Hugh Oliver Denys for guard hanging on at the rear. Not far behind followed an open carriage, also well filled, with Mrs. Consett in charge, and Marie-Irene sitting by her. Tom Rose trotted alongside on a rather sorry nag,

but in capital spirits, though this was the last day, and the wind-up of his holiday. Everybody did as Old Crump did, and stood to watch until the expedition disappeared down the hill on the road to Cambourne, leaving a long trail of musical echoes behind it.

"Going a-pleasuring, the young folks," called out to the agent with a big voice from the distance another of the Todds—Ben, an old blue-jacket who had seen the world, and done wonders before he retired from the sea. "It's good to be young, and go a-pleasuring, Mr. Crump."

"Ay, and it's good to be old, to have done your duty, and to live at ease on a pension, Ben Todd," was Crump's reply, and he halted on his sticks with a tendency to linger and talk as Ben drew near; for Ben was famous for conversation, and seemed in the vein.

But to them arrived before their compliments

of greeting were over a stranger in Cote, "an innyvator," as the ancients called him, who advertised himself as a general agent, and was probably the person responsible for the advent of *The Newsboy*. The innovator took off his hat with obsequious respect, and a bend of his whole body. Crump glowered at him, and looked dangerous.

"Now what may you be wanting next, Mr. Crowe?" he demanded with sulky deprecation, as if Mr. Crowe's requisitions were unreasonable and vexatious, yet not too lightly to be denied.

"I am wanting nothing just at present, Mr. Crump, sir, unless it be a little patience, and I see you've none to spare," Crowe answered, not abating his deferential graces, but conveying a very disagreeable impression by his tone and smile.

"I've told you already that you'll be just

thrown away in Cote, Mr. Crowe," Crump rejoined. "Cote ain't at all the field for your remarkable talents. You'd a deal better carry 'em to Cambourne. There's a fine opening for a reformer there. Cote is backward."

"*Backward!* I believe you," Crowe retorted, and shook his head as if an awful state of things was being revealed to his inner consciousness. "It's twenty years behind the age! It's a country village yet! No pier, no beautiful stuccoed mansions, no slated houses —just your old tiles and thatch, and plain bricks and stone that you're forced to hide up with ivy and flowers to make 'em pass. Cote is the old fashion'dist place I was ever in. *Backward*, indeed—*backward*'s no word for it!"

Ben Todd's wrath had been brewing from the moment of Crowe's appearance on the scene. "Back'ard yourself! owld-fashioned

yourself!" growled he like an aged mastiff preparing to tackle an assailant. "If Cote ain't got no iron grid to call it a pier, nor no stucky mansions to mildew an' stan' empty, it's because we're had more wit nor to build 'em. You'd better be off to wherever you came from. You'll find nought to please you i' Cote. Cote don't belong to you, nor you to Cote. Cote 'ud rether hev your room than your company. There's not a chink where you'll fit in. Cote's ruled by law and Gospel now, whatever it may ha' been i' the former times. We ain't got no abuses to ventilate. We ain't got nothing partickler to grummle at, unless it be the weather that blows hard when the ladies wants to picnic on the water, and I don't expec' the *Newsboy*'s got much interest wi' the clerk o' the weather. It's not likely when the parsons hasn't: I've heerd 'em pray for a change o' weather i' church, an' no

notice taken." Ben paused for breath, contemplated by Mr. Crowe with a compassionate eye.

"Sir," said the innovator with mournful emphasis—"sir, there's no social peril so perilous as resting satisfied with things as they *be*."

Ben's breath had returned to him, and he replied with deep sarcastic intention: "I reckon that depends on *how* they be. Cote won't rest satisfied long wi' *you*, if you be what I take you fur, Mr. Crowe. If you're well advised you'll move on to Cambourne. At Cambourne they've got a Lokil Bor' to peck at, wish 'em joy on him, an' a whole battalion o' spies an' troubles. There's a heap o' folks Squire Midas don't suit, that can no more change him than the nose on their faces. Midas ain't done well by hisself, an' folks has given up speaking well of him. You go to Cambourne, Mr. Crowe, an' help 'em, an' as likely as not you'll

get a silver mug given. Chaps is often getting mugs given at Cambourne—happen you'll be next. We don't give mugs at Cote. We finds it cheaper to keep the peace. We finds it pays better to do our duty all round, an' to be o' one mind i' Cote, than to fall out an' fight, an' mek it up again wi' a subscription for a mug."

"Just so. You are all of one mind to choose darkness rather than light, and Cote is without gas—*without gas,*" Crowe repeated in the manner of a man who urges a great accusation.

Old Crump glowered more dangerously than before, and chaffered faster with his blue lips; for, indeed, the lack of gas had been felt as a flaw in the perfections of Cote. Ben Todd was more on a level with the occasion. He laughed derisively, pointing the finger of scorn at the innovator. "Why, man, where have

you been tarrying this long while not to know that Cote's waiting till that beautiful invention that's to put gas out is tried up in London? When they've tried it up i' London, Cote 'ull take to it direckly—Cote ain't going to be put off wi' aught that's second-best at this time o' day. But if that beautiful invention don't quite act at fust—why, then, we may get a gas-works—just for a mekshift, d'ye see?"

Crowe was both impressed and perplexed. He had not heard of the new invention that was to put gas out, and was not ready with a reply. While he hesitated for inspiration Crump took the opportunity of retreating, and Ben Todd followed, flinging a last taunt at his adversary: "There's gas at Cambourne—awful bad-smelling gas. There's everything at Cambourne to mek a man like you happy, Mr. Crowe. You hurry off. Your hair's growed a bit, but it's not much out of the fashion for

them as likes it clipped close. Cote'll not miss you. I don't know as I shall put on mourning myself, but if I do you'll be sure to hear on it."

The quiet time of day at Cote was in the afternoon, while the sun was still hot, and the shadows were not deep enough for the pleasant sense of shade. The shopkeepers on the south side of the Green Square were the first to draw their awnings up, and at four o'clock, here and there, a figure might be seen standing in the doorways, looking out for the revival of life that always began towards five. The earliest to come out were the young ladies, picturesquely equipped and costumed for the archery or tennis ground, attended or shortly followed by young gentlemen, similarly accoutred. Next to appear were family groups, often with a patient ass and panniers in their midst, returning home with plumes of fern and

foxglove from a children's picnic in the woods. Instantly, on the stroke of half-past five, all the trades that help in building struck work; and a numerous gang, coming down from the new church, filed off across the Green Square. More slowly trudged the old fellows, gardeners by the day, who eked out the remnants of life with odd shillings, and refused to sit down and be idle while the strength to do a hand's-turn was left them.

One of these last, Matthew Burt, mole-catcher in the peninsula these sixty years, had appointed a meeting with Old Crump on business under the great elm-tree at the hour of leaving work, to save useless steps. True to time, the agent came up as the other was sitting down and stretching his long lean limbs with a sense of welcome rest.

There was a question of Burt's cottage and garden, relics of antiquity to which the old

man clung with the tenacity of a life-long occupation. A new-comer to Cote wanted them to complete his domain, and Mr. Denys had said he must make his own bargain with Burt. It was not his practice now to disturb any old tenant who wished to keep his holding. If rich men coveted Naboth's vineyard, it was open to them to buy Naboth out, but not to take his vineyard by law or by might. The stranger had offered Burt a pension of six shillings a week to give up his cottage, and Crump, who was always in favour of improving an opportunity, wished to persuade him that he would be more comfortable with the money living in lodgings and cared for by a decent neighbour, than he was living alone in his solitary cottage at Copse Row, half a mile from the village. Burt could not see it.

They sat down to have their talk side by

side on the bench encircling the great elm-tree, and having sat down were in no haste to move again. They began their discussion with some vigour—Crump opened the business.

"If you don't want to go, you are free to stay. You have only to say so, and there's an end. But you'll stand in your own light—that's my opinion, Matthew Burt, if you care to know it. You are getting into years."

"Eighty-two, Mr. Crump, eighty-two, come Martinmas—if I live to see it."

"That's a long age, Matthew Burt: a man can't expect to feel young after eighty-two, though he may get about, and do a tidy bit o' work when the weather's favourable. And you'd be better off in the decline o' life with a quiet widow-woman such as Mrs. Trotter is to 'tend on you, than left all alone by yourself up at Copse Row."

"I've never been left to myself, Mr. Crump,

never. Them that belonged to me is all gone, an' I've missed 'em, but I've never been left to myself. The ould parson, he's very good; he comes up ofttimes, an' sits down, an' says a word, pondering-like—as if the gret mysteries was no clearer to him than to me; an' then he speaks cheerful—'This we know, Burt, them that love God, God loves,' he says, an' gives me a shake o' the hand, an' goes. I'm always happier when ould parson's been. And it seems to me when I'm alone most, in the night, when I get thinking o' them that's gone, an' feel mournful, there's a some one comes, an' stan's by me—as it might be my Saviour. I should be better satisfied to stop at home, Mr. Crump, an' die there. When I set the door open I see the last o' the sunset—it would not be nat'ral not to see the last o' the sunset, and Mrs. Trotter's door looks t'other way."

"Then we'll let the thing drop, Matthew Burt. What the squire said was: 'Let him go of his goodwill or not at all.'"

"Squire could put me out by law, Mr. Crump?"

"He could so, and would have done it without twice thinking once. But he's learned a different way."

"The law's a poor imperfect instrument to do right by, Mr. Crump."

"I was never one that reckoned much o' the law, but a deal depends on the handling. There's some very queer law i' the peninsula. I'd rather let a small thief go than bring him up before Rowboro' bench. Squire Midas ain't much of a man to ha' taken old Sir Martin Deane Foxe's seat."

"I've known Squire Midas a many years. He don't mean so badly as he sometimes does; but I can't name a man, high or low, that I've

felt to pity more than Squire Midas—an' so proud an pleased as he used to be wi' himself. First an' last, I'd rether hev the portion God's given me, Mr. Crump."

When the old men's talk diverged into general matters, it fell into frequent rests and pauses. The mole-catcher was hungry for his supper, but he lingered respectfully until Mr. Crump should give the sign to move. The air was very still and delicate. All looked beautiful: the clear, pale blue of the sky, the full deep green of the verdure, the softened outlines and long slanting shadows of the houses, that began to stretch across the square. All felt peaceful. Any noise there was came from a long way off. Old Crump gazed into the distance, dimly, drowsily, thinking of nothing. Figures were appearing by twos and threes for their evening walk, but they were few yet, and their feet rang on the pavement.

"What's yon?" Crump said, suddenly waking up, and lifting his head to listen. "A runaway horse?"

Matthew Burt lifted his head, and listened too. The sound was too regular, marked, and even for a horse running away, but somebody was riding hard on the road, and coming towards the town.

Crump stood up, supporting himself on his sticks, and bending all his attention on the swift rider. "My mind misgives me that some accident's happened to that party of young folks that went a-pleasuring this morning," he muttered — all his thoughts centred on the squire's son.

The messenger rode into the Green Square at a hand-gallop. The sleepy stillness was broken. All at once the place was astir. The people poured out of their houses to see and hear what was up. The messenger drew rein

at the gate of the inn: he was not known there, but he rode a good horse of the squire's, and its wet flanks declared the pace they had kept.

Crump had hobbled that way and overheard him ask at what hour the break was timed to be back that had carried Captain Meade's picnic party out beyond Cambourne. It was timed to be back at nine o'clock. Not till nine o'clock, and it was only seven now! He trotted round to the Manor House, and stopped a minute at the doctor's door in passing. The doctor appeared without his hat, and took his orders himself. In a quarter of an hour he was off.

"There goes Dr. Swift," said the people standing about exchanging speculations and imperfect intelligence, and Crump observed that Crowe was speeding after him.

Presently a groom, well mounted and leading

another horse, passed at a sharp trot through the Green Square—despatched from the Manor House to intercept young Denys on the road home, and to carry him across country to where he was wanted. That incident told a story. Soon afterwards the light vehicle that went to Rowborough Market on Saturdays drove by, conveying Mr. Knapp and Mrs. Brice.

Crump had spoken to no one, and now he started to hobble homewards alone. When he got indoors, and was sat down in his chair, he said to his niece, who lived with him and kept his house: "Some misfortune's befallen the squire. I cannot go to him—I'm too old and feeble. If it is the end of the curse, I've lived long enough."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"HERE WE PART COMPANY."

"Do not shudder and do not fear,
Hold your breath
For a kingly presence is drawing near.
'Blessed is he that cometh
In the name of the Lord.'"

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

AT the same hour of the evening, in the ground-floor room of a roadside inn, Mr. Denys lay, struck down in the plenitude of strength, looking death in the face fearlessly as he had looked most things that had met him in his course. His wife was with him, helpless unless by her tender patience. It was so still in the room that the beat of the clock in the kitchen across the passage might have been counted—unconsciously between whiles Delia

did count it, and the thing that had happened seemed as old as all knowledge.

The place was mid-way betwixt Navestock and Beauminster, or a little nearer the city. The principal surgeon at the hospital there had been sent for post-haste, had come, and was anxious to be gone again post-haste, too busy to spend precious time there, where he could do no good.

"I have got my death. I feel that the wound is mortal," Mr. Denys had said to him.

A very brief examination, and the surgeon said: "Yes, it is indeed mortal." To the woman of the house he whispered: "It is of no use teasing him. Keep the flies from his face."

At that instant Mrs. Denys arrived with Mr. Arthur Meade. She was intensely still and self-controlled. She knew the surgeon by

sight, and stopped before him. Question and answer were given in the exchange of a silent look. To Mr. Meade the gentleman spoke a few words with his foot in the stirrup: "It is murder, they say, and the police have taken a man. You are a magistrate, and a clergyman too? Then I leave the business in your hands. One of my assistants had orders to follow me, and here he comes. He will remain in the house to render any succour that is possible—Mr. Denys will not see the morning."

Delia had passed straight into the room. Her husband held out his hand to her: "I made my way here from the Three Beeches: it was the nearest place. You have been very quick, love," he said with an eager, pitiful kindness and thankfulness.

"I sent your messenger on to Cote, to bring Hughie."

"Quite right, quite right. You met Blox-

ham going out? Then you know my sentence."

Delia made a sign, but could not speak again.

"Don't cry, Delia; I had my warning, and expected this. Thank God for an easy death —and I leave you your boy."

Delia had no thought of herself, only of her husband. On his face it was written that doom was come, and no time to waste.

"Take your hat off, and sit down near me —here where I can see you: I want you to mind two or three things I had forgotten," he said.

A huge chintz-covered squab had been drawn away from the wall, and on that Mr. Denys lay prone. His wife took the place he showed her, the corner of a low seat in the window, a wide lattice sunk in the thickness of the wall, from which some plants in pots

had been removed, and set upon the floor. He could see her there between him and the light, could see her tears falling, and hold her hand—fifteen years that day since he married her, his wife who had been tender and constant and patient always.

It was a very old house, the first stage out of Beauminster in coaching days, and much decayed and sunk in the world now. But the room was spacious and cool with both leaves of the lattice open, and, looking towards the north, had the glow of sunset without its glare. A garden gay with common flowers lay underneath, and when Delia's eyes once sought a moment's relief from the ghostly semblance of her husband's face, she saw gillyflowers, and pinks, and tall pale columbines hanging their heads. And she saw Mr. Meade and the surgeon's assistant, who had taken refuge in a wild hop and honey-suckle arbour from the

fervour of the kitchen fire, talking energetically together.

Mr. Denys had requested to be left with his wife alone. The one or two things he had forgotten and wanted her to mind were told brokenly, at intervals, as he found strength, or as lapsing memory caught at the threads that were tangled and slipping away.

Marie-Irene was very present to him—Delia was to let Marie-Irene go into retreat at her convent for a little while if she desired to do so: "And whatever happens afterwards, she has her brothers, who love her dearly," he said, and was silent for some time watching the sunlight fade along the wall. He made no other reference to the marriage that he had so anxiously schemed for her, and Delia understood by the manner of his allusion that he probably foresaw the failure of that hope. When he spoke next it was to ask whether

the room where old Mrs. Blythe died was as bare and grim as this where he lay.

Delia leaned down, sobbing, touching his hand with her lips: "Oh, my love, what matters the room? You are going into the presence of God. I have prayed, God knows how I have prayed, that you be forgiven that sin. Remember Christ's love."

"I have never been able to forgive myself."

There was another prolonged silence, and the grey twilight drew like a veil over all. It was interrupted by the approach of footsteps, heavy and hurried, that would not be restrained from coming to the door. Mr. Denys asked if it was Hughie, and was told by his mother that it was too soon—Hughie could not arrive yet. She rose, directing her observation towards a towering figure that entered, and, halting a moment to look, advanced straight to the couch on which her

husband lay stretched. There were other figures behind in the doorway.

"A living dog is better than a dead lion. He shall not stand in peril for the sake of a word," said a strong voice, determined and trembling with excitement, in which Delia recognised a tone she knew though she could not see the face of the intruder.

There was a breathless pause, the witnesses all intent on what next; and the same voice, a note lower, said again: "A living dog is better than a dead lion. You are a dead man, Denys—speak up, and tell the truth. Who fired the shot that laid you low?"

"Who is it that asks?" Mr. Denys said sharply, as if his fainting senses were stung into spasmodic strength.

"It is Jack Blythe—of the Orchard once. They have taken my brother Richard for your murder."

"It was Cousin Ralph Denys—he's mad, you know. Ralph Denys at the Warren House, does everybody hear? Let them call in Meade, Delia. I must make a deposition, or the young men may be hindered from sailing next Monday."

It was characteristic of Mr. Denys to tell a plain tale, briefly and without colouring. Mr. Meade wrote it as he dictated.

"It was about four o'clock, on the edge of Branksome Wood, where the footpath from the Three Beeches strikes down through the copse in the direction of Gooden's farm. I saw Cousin Ralph coming towards me, and carrying his gun. He was alone. He sang out, covered me, and fired on the instant. I swerved or he would have shot me dead—he was a capital shot always. You will find his gun lying in the bracken. He threw it down, and ran away when I dropped. He

laughed and holla'ed as he ran—he's mad, quite mad, you know, but cunning as they all are, and he had meant it long. I did not go in fear—what would have been the use? I knew he would have me some day. I lay quiet a bit, and then dragged myself along by the bushes here, and they brought me in."

It had been a supreme effort of resolution, but Mr. Denys had remembered Delia, and that nerved him. He had left her at Navestock rectory with her mother and cousin after they had taken luncheon, intending to go up to New Place, and had afterwards changed his mind, and started to walk to Mr. Gooden's farm in the contrary direction. He reflected that when he failed to return she would not know his whereabouts, to have him sought for, and her distress would be cruel: so, wounded to death, he had trailed

painfully to this poor shelter, and had sent for her to come. This he explained in answer to questions, then heard his account read, and set his name to it. That done, he seemed to sink into deeper exhaustion, but continued to gaze at the powerful, tall figure that stood aloof in the dim candle-light, gazing fixedly upon him.

Presently, at a sound outside, Mr. Denys asked again, "Is that Hughie?" and said that he thought he might lie a little easier if his position were altered. It was Jack Blythe who raised him. Soon after he grew restless, and began to wander. "Is Clarges there? Old friend, I should like to hear your voice." Mr. Meade stooped down, and said something at his ear. He seemed to listen, but not to be satisfied. He sighed heavily. Delia was kneeling by the bed, stifling her sobs. "If I say a prayer, can you hear me, Hugh; can you

follow *my* voice?" she whispered. A momentary quiver passed over his face, and he said distinctly: "Surely I can." Here Mr. Swift came in, looked on him, and stood back out of sight.

It was still early in the night when Knapp and Mrs. Brice arrived. They both entered the room, the woman clasping her hands, awed, stealthy-footed, fearful, but Knapp with his alert, quick manner of obedience, as if he had just heard his master call.

The familiar sound penetrated Mr. Denys' dulled senses, and he moved his head. "Is that you, Knapp?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. We made haste. I knew you would want me, being in trouble, and Mrs. Brice too," Knapp answered with feeling.

"You have been good servants. How long have you known me, Knapp?"

"From a boy, sir — from a boy just such another as your own."

"You have known the best and the worst of me, then."

"Yes, sir. Your mother was alive at that time—old madam at Acklam. She was very lame before she died, sir."

"She missed my strong arm to lean on—I recollect she said so. My dear wife will miss it too. Hughie, be a better man than your father was, and take care of your mother." But Hughie was not there.

"Lay me straight in the bed, Knapp. Here we part company—we are sinners all, Clarges —God ha' mercy on us, an' good-night."

It was peep of day when young Denys arrived, and found his father dead. He insisted upon seeing him, there and then, and was not to be dissuaded. Knapp carried the

light, and Mr. Swift folded back the sheet from the face.

"Was this my father?" the boy said, and stood staring bewildered on the massive figure all decently composed, and the visage as if carven in stone. There was no expression of pain, and the stillness was more profound than the stillness of the deepest sleep. Tears blurred his vision, and with a passionate cry he said, stooping a little, and taking one of the cold hands: "Papa, do you hear me? all that I promised you I will do." "But there was no voice, nor any that answered."

After a while he asked for his mother, and was told that they had taken her away to the rectory at Navestock, on which he said that he would stay *there*, with his father; and Knapp, knowing that his young master, like his old one who was gone, had some peculiar notions of goodness and kindness to his own, would not

have him reasoned with, but made him eat and rest under the same roof: and eat and rest he did, with the appetite and healthful weariness of youth, that eats and sleeps in spite of sorrow.

He was not waking yet in the middle of the morning when Mr. Orme came, but he was roused when Mr. Daventry and others arrived, and sent out of the way of the grim formalities that follow on a violent death.

Delia had her mother to comfort her, but her heart yearned at her son's voice. "You have seen your father, Hughie?" she asked, and kissed him.

"Yes, mother. And I have told him that all I promised before I will do."

And then they sat and talked together—the two in the world nearest to one another now.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CURSE ENDED.

"One event happeneth to all men."

THE day that Mr Denys was buried will be long remembered in Cote.

"He said he should be back within the week, and here he comes," Mr. Essex-Brough muttered. "'As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between any of us and death,' he said; and this was what he meant, Chattie."

Mr. Essex-Brough had caused himself to be brought from the Glen House, which was off the main road, to the old, original library and bazaar, and helped upstairs to the pretty quaint parlour over the shop, to see the last of

his friend. Only his wife was with him, and she had locked the door.

"Cry, Chattie, cry, if it's a relief and comfort to you. I always knew you loved him, and no harm to me," he said with cynical coolness.

It was in the pride of the morning. The dew was on the grass still. The little jangling bell at the old church had begun tolling at a signal that the procession was in sight. The squire was carried in an open waggon, harnessed with four splendid draught-horses, in gala trappings—this by his son's first act of authority, in deference to a whim that he had once lightly expressed: "If I die from home—at Navestock, say—too far to carry me on men's shoulders, carry me in Gooden's waggon, with his four black horses;" and so he was carried, travelling through the night.

All the way up the church road was lined with people—Cote people, and strangers from

far and near—who closed in behind the procession, and crowded the churchyard. A space round the graves below the chancel window had been fenced in, that the curious might not press too close: there were two graves open, one a little way off, and across the foot of the other, by which stood already the coffin that was to be placed in it. It was the coffin of Old Crump. Some who had often wished him in heaven eyed it with a touch of compunction. The poor lameter, with no friend but his master, had never looked up since his death, but had died of that blow.

There were no women amongst the mourners. The squire's three sons were there, and other squires and gentlemen many. Those in the throng who did not know imagined him to have been a neighbour widely beloved and respected.

Perhaps he was, latterly. They said nothing

but good of him when he was dead, and there were plentiful tears when the rector preached his sermon the next Sunday. The church was full of folks from all round the peninsula. This is a part of what they listened to :

"Most of you who are here present knew the two men whom last week we laid in the narrow house appointed for all living. I am not here to make their panegyric or their apology. 'We are sinners all—God have mercy on us,' with his last breath one of these two confessed and prayed. So may we confess and pray—every one, every one. We are sinners all—God have mercy on us.

"Brethren, there is no life without its misery: thankless labour, joyless care, the secret sense of guilt ; but give us patience, hope, contrition, and our hearts are infused with strength to endure, to look up, to do better. We deceive ourselves, we deceive our neighbour, but God

is not deceived. We misjudge ourselves, we misjudge our neighbour, but God rewards every man according to his work—his WORK. When we take our wages, then we know what God calls our WORK, and pay-day comes over and over again for us, even in this life. Say you covet money, and make haste to be rich; buying and selling—no matter what, be it land, be it goods—forestalling the market, wearying yourselves early and late, letting nothing pass you, in hopes to rest and be satisfied presently; but just when you look to enter on a settled prosperity custom forsakes you—you are found out, pay-day has come: overreaching and fraud have been your WORK, not honest trading. Say you are greedy of power, and push into an office of authority by sheer force of interest, not possessing the wisdom and judicial mind indispensable to the fulfilment of its duties; you have got where you wanted

to be, and sit fast, executing your office with an air of fitness, punishing punctually evil-doers in a small way, letting a great rogue go here and there if well befriended, and sending to prison by mischance an innocent person or two; and then pay-day falls due, and your wages are not honour, but derision and contempt, and a downfall. Or say that you are a minister of the Gospel, and you love ease and that men should speak well of you—that you are kindly affectioned, and would choose rather the way of peace that condones an evil than the way of God's appointing that resists it: you become then a partaker in the evil, and it is recorded against you; you have not been found faithful, and one day your wages of unfaithfulness are paid you: 'I am in trouble—come at another time—you have no message for me now,' whispers a voice in pain."

Here the old clergyman covered his eyes for a minute. Then he resumed: "My brethren, I preach to myself as well as to you. Let us look more boldly to the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us behold the MAN, and endeavour henceforth to follow more closely the example of His self-renunciation, His courage, and His great humility. We have all some law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and have need every day to ask for grace to withstand its temptation and discouragement. Seven times tradition says that Christ fell under His cross on the way to Calvary, and the outside voices jeered him—'Go on, go on.' There is no more compassion for the overweighted and weak amongst ourselves. They fall, and we cast a stone at them. But an invisible hand helps them, perhaps, to rise upon their feet, leads them to pleasant places, spares them a little before they

go hence, and are no more seen—be sure then there was a cry: 'Lord, save us, we perish!' We will not return upon the lives of the two men whose deaths are fresh in our remembrance—the one was but the servant and shadow of the other. You know as well as myself what packs they carried, how they stumbled and fell, and what scant measure of compassion they got—of *human compassion*. The Divine compassion was more long-suffering, and left them a place of repentance. What ill they did was not covered. What they did after that was right, wise, and useful, your children's children may thank God for, who does not quench the smoking flax beneath which the faintest spark of aspiration towards His law still smoulders."

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

WITH THE YOUNG GENERATION.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WIDOWED.

"My sun has set, I dwell
In darkness."

CHRISTINA ROSSETI.

MOST people's lives are divided into three chief periods. Each has its opening of rapid incidents, its long tract of monotony, and its close, which arrives always with the seeming abruptness of a great change or a great loss. Mrs. Denys' life was no exception to the rule. From her birth to her courtship were twenty years of warm home-love and peace. Then ensued her marriage with Mr. Denys of Cote, that seemed of such dark omen, but came out into the clear at last, and was

happy enough to thank God for when death cruelly cut it short. Then it was as if a curtain had been drawn between her and the world for evermore. If Mr. Denys had died in his bed, there might have been silence, but the public inquiry into his killing disinterred forgotten griefs and sins, and the carrion crows of journalism held their inquisition week by week upon them, re-telling the old stories and moralising anew over the old scandals like the chorus of a Greek tragedy. But it was a deliverance from worse when a jury decided that his killing was not murder.

There seems more to be said of the evil that men do than of the good, but at Cote the good that Mr. Denys had done was seen, and there they gave him his pennyworth of praise. At Navestock too—but the good *there* was but an act of restitution, incomplete yet, and not perfectly understood. Nevertheless it was

noted that the curse which had dogged the Denyses of Cote since Navestock was wrongfully gotten had ceased; and some inquirer, more diligent than the majority, pretended to the discovery of a rhymed prophecy that thus and thus it should cease, and the couplet became current, after the event, as a chime Ralph Denys had sung in his mad moments. From this it was an easy speculation for the wonder-wise that the prophecy had been the leading agent of its own fulfilment. The ways of God are past finding out, but what was certainly authentic was, that Mr. Denys of Cote was dead, and had left a son to sit in his seat—a thing that had not happened to any Denys of Cote for seven generations.

Mrs. Denys' widowhood began in a deep and settled gloom. She returned to the Manor House with her boy alone, refusing other society. She had a mind to shut out the noise

and rumours of the time, but somehow she could not. If she did not hear, she dreaded worse than was said, and she could be told nothing that she had not known long before. It was like that trial of the dead they held in ancient Egypt—the truth without gloss—before decreeing a man's funeral. She would fain have had Hughie grow up in the belief that his father was a good man, high in good men's esteem, but he was too old to be cheated of what the *Newsboy* made common fame. One day he asked her not to send him back to school, but to let him return to the instructions of Mr. Orme. She consented. Both of them clung yet to the covert of their mourning, and they were the best companions for one another.

Marie-Irene was in her convent, John was in London, George had finally returned to Rome.

Lady Herrick and Cousin Elizabeth Paul were the only neighbours to whom the doors of the Manor House were opened for several months. Cousin Elizabeth Paul was full of sorrow, pity, and ruth for her friend, Hugh Denys, even as Delia herself was. "They none of them knew him but us," she said. And Lady Herrick was sensible, encouraging, strengthening. "You cannot hold up your head yet, I know, but look at my Jenny." Jenny was a two years' widow, and time had worked the miracle of consolation on her that Delia could not anticipate. "Your pain is worse, is stranger than hers, but you have a joy the more—you have a son. Let him carry your thoughts on. Look forward." On another occasion she bade her dare also to look back: "As far back as when you lost Willie." And, indeed, those last six years of Mr. Denys' life would have been a quiet

resting-place for his wife's thoughts but for the defilement of his grave by the ghoulish purveyors of sensational paragraphs.

It is in the nature of things that grief should tire, come it from sorrow, or from sorrow and shame mingled. An immense sympathy waited on Mrs. Denys, a sympathy as wide as the love that she had deserved, but for the present she would none of it. Her heart was out of tune with tenderness, and burning with indignation. Give her time.

Her tall figure had been one of the most familiar in the neighbourhood from the activity of her habits, and she was not long missing from her favourite walks. Labourers going to their work early in the morning met her in field and lane, wearing a long black cloak and vast slouched straw-hat. She commonly carried upon her arm a capacious basket. If she walked through the plantations she would

fill it with fir-cones, chips of wood, and fallen sticks, and would disencumber herself of the collection now at one poor cottage, and now at another. Sometimes the basket disgorged food—broken bread and meat where children abounded, or, where there was sickness, a chicken, a young rabbit, a parcel of tea, of groats, or a bundle of clothing. The lady walked at a great pace always, and it was no unusual thing for her to travel twice and thrice a day that autumn between the Manor House and any house of the village where there was need. In the outskirts she spoke to every poor body she met. If they were strangers, she asked their names, occupations, whence they were coming and whither going. If they were Cote people, she inquired about their families and general concerns, which she held under regular and firm investigation, occasionally administering help to the unemployed in

the shape of a distasteful task to be undertaken and finished out of hand, if she suspected that the reason of their standing idle was a love of idleness. Few things escaped her, or happened without her knowledge in the place. She was called by some too inquisitive and domineering. There was a mixed, necessitous proportion amongst the inhabitants now—women for whom she executed a charity as if the need of it were a crime, and men whom she admonished with the severity of a magistrate. The only creatures never afraid of her were little children. She did not lecture them, as growing boys and girls gave her often opportunity to do. If she passed them with a quick, silent nod, they would stand at gaze with awful admiration; but if she addressed them they would sidle up, and suffer themselves to be catechised without alarm. Her ordinary manner had a touch of irritability now, and her

beautiful countenance a shadow of sternness, but there were times when she would listen to a tedious sad story with softened eyes and a warmth of kindness that effaced a multitude of hasty, petulant words. It became a current plea for her that, poor lady, she had awful thoughts to carry about with her—God help her—and did not always know in what high gusts of temper she spoke.

That her husband had died as he did was not, however, the haunting horror to Mrs. Denys' imagination that her neighbours supposed. He had never in his lifetime had to suffer pain, and had said often that to be a long while a-dying would not suit him. Also she had hope in his death. She had learnt to pray once, and women do not quit that good practice who have any true vision of the world before them. Her burden was *silence*. Other widows might praise their

husbands, but she must sit dumb. Mrs. Consett loved to refer her boys to their father as a soldier who had done his duty, and died with honour on the field of battle. Mrs. Wilton comforted herself with the recollection that her dear Charlie had been able to accomplish some good work, ill and suffering as his life was. But if she spoke of his father to Hughie it was with bated breath, with tears in her eyes, and a feeling of deprecation, for Hughie always blushed. So it came to pass that they seldom spoke of him at all. Oh, pride in the dead is a great solace, as pride in the living is a great joy, and it seemed that she must never expect to have it.

While Mr. Denys was alive he had given his wife many useful lessons in the conduct of affairs, and he had left her sole guardian of their son and executrix of his will. In the midst, in the heaviest of her trouble, she had

always enough to do, of actual business that had to be done, to occupy a considerable part of every day. Power came to her with independent authority, but the sense of responsibility imposed a check on her self-confidence, and educated her into a sweet reasonableness, than which there could be no more persuasive influence with her boy, and no better instrument of feminine rule. She had Mr. Quorn to advise her of immediate duties, and with a prompt and vigorous hand she cut down the establishment at the Manor House, abolishing every form of expenditure that was become unnecessary or that belonged to mere display. Mr. Denys' hunters were sent to market with Mr. Essex-Brough's; the mail-phaeton and its spanking pair were never brought back to Cote; and several servants, both indoors and out, left with a year's wages to seek other homes. Knapp retired on a pension that his

master had given him, and Mrs. Brice went away to Acklam, which was her native country, making room for Phœbe—her mistress' own woman always, but henceforward to be her housekeeper also. Mrs. Denys had no feeling of personal sacrifice in anything she did, and Mr. Quorn gave her credit for great judgment and resolution. Her household was still liberally planned, and Hugh Oliver had every indulgence that it was desirable he should have as future master and owner of all.

But the changed place it was when all was re-arranged—the dull, quiet place it was, emptied of the chief figure, and every familiar sign and token of the lost presence put out of sight.

Inevitably there were days when the time was very long. When the leaves fell and the robins began to sing, Mrs. Denys went every morning to the old nursery again, and fed

Willie's birds, and stood a minute or two before his trophy of arms hanging always above the mantel-piece—she seemed to make a religious observance of former usages. Phœbe came to her there, and took her orders, and perhaps they talked a little. After that the mistress would, as a rule, retire to the room that had been her husband's for the transaction of business, and remain shut up there until Hughie returned at twelve o'clock from his lessons with Mr. Orme, when they made together a survey of things round the house out-of-doors, such as need the owner's eye to keep them in good order. From the beginning Mrs. Denys took her son into her confidence, and endeavoured to interest him in the duties of their condition; and if Hughie found them tedious sometimes, or interfering with his liberty, he was careful not to betray it. His mother felt a daily growing benefit and pleasure in his

company—he drew her out of herself. But a little thing happened presently that caused Mr. Orme to say that the lad would be better at school.

"He shall go then, after Christmas," his mother answered, not considering herself.

But after Christmas, when Hughie was actually gone, she felt herself alone indeed. Thereupon Marie-Irene proposed to leave her convent and come to her. She came with her bright young face and sweet singing to make sunshine in the shady place, attracting about the Manor House other young people —Mrs. Consett's girls, and especially Kitty, to whom Mrs. Denys affectionately took on having it called to her remembrance that her husband had been partial to Kitty, who was also Hugh Oliver's favourite of the family.

Marie-Irene was not for weeping overmuch. One afternoon towards dusk, in the boudoir,

looking out of the window, she said: "This is about the time papa used to come back from his hunting. I wish we could see his old scarlet coat appearing and disappearing through the trees. To hear his step and his great voice again—what music!"

The girl's words had a plaintive intonation, and Mrs. Denys said: "Does the stillness weigh upon you, dear? This is a house of mourning, you know."

Marie-Irene said, "Oh, no," but she sighed; and it was, in fact, stiller than the convent.

A day or two afterwards Captain Meade presented himself at the Manor House. Mrs. Denys received him kindly, and sent for Marie-Irene out of the Dutch garden. She came, but it was not seen that her countenance lightened any more at finding him than it had done at finding other friends and acquaintances who were admitted now. Captain Meade

was last from London, and she questioned him of plays and concerts, which were her chief delight in town ; and when he was gone, she proceeded to expound her enthusiastic desire for the opportunity of following on system her musical and dramatic studies, as if in the design of turning her talents to professional purposes. Mrs. Denys heard her attentively. Either she was an exquisite dissembler, or love was not in all her thoughts—which was the more likely ; and this was not the time to speak of it.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WITH MEMORY.

"Death came unheralded—but it was well."—J. H. Newman.

When the New Year was about three months old, John Denys ran down to Cote, and, with Mrs. Denys' consent, carried his sister away, to make her home with him, and to pursue her studies according to her avowed wish.

Under these circumstances it was not difficult to persuade Mrs. Denys to go to Auldcaster for a change. Sir John Daventry was very anxious that she should make the effort; and once there, she was not sorry to be in the midst of her people, and quit for a while of

the oppressive quiet and solitude of the Manor House. She had her own little old room with the crewel-worked linen hangings, and could see out of the window the former times and seasons very well. It was a sad retrospect to see them, yet on the whole it did her good. And to talk long with her mother—that did her good too. With her grandfather there was still the sense of a barrier. There had been reconciliation and a renewal of kindness; but the delicate spring of loving confidence, once broken, will bear the marks of fracture to the end. After the first touching words of reunion they talked together with a conscious avoidance of subjects closest to the heart of both. They made conversation, with pauses of silence, and fresh starts that never carried them far. The judge had been ailing, and was at last, but almost imperceptibly, become quite the old man—liable to failures

of memory and lapses of attention that seemed like deafness, but were not that infirmity, for his hearing was still acute. Delia was glad she had come when she saw how he was altered, though in coming her thoughts had centred on her own affairs. She had brought with her the letters that her husband had written and deposited in the locked drawer of his escritoire the day preceding his death, and other letters and papers besides, to prove to her friends —what had never been denied—how good and thoughtful Mr. Denys always was for his own.

Mr. Denys had indeed been very good and thoughtful for all whom his loss would bereave of a friend or a master, and Delia could not endure that any of her family should rest unconvinced of what had made the happiness of her married life. None of them, perhaps, cared to be convinced, but they cared to soothe

and satisfy her, and Cricket consented that but for two or three circumstances, of which he did not possibly see all the bearings, Mr. Denys would have been a finer character than the common run of men. Walter, who was a lively, irreverent, briefless barrister, gave his opinion dead against his grandfather in that famous case where Pericles was quoted, but afterwards he gave it with even-handed justice equally dead against Mr. Denys in the later and more disastrous contention of the Orchard. One or other of her brothers was always ready to agree with Delia, whatever her manifest humour of the moment; but it was evident soon that the story of events drifting down the past, which was not *their* past, had very little interest for any one but herself, and that some passages of it they might all wish to have buried in oblivion.

Lady Daventry observed her grand-daughter

with a tenderer eye than her wont. She perceived that her discipline had been severe, that her heart still bled, that her spirit had been deeply wounded, and her pride cruelly abased. She perceived also that she was striving to be at peace again, and putting resentments from her, and she met her in her own peculiar fashion.

"I understand that you were a very good wife, Delia, and guided your husband, of whom we did not think much, into a nobler way of life than he had led before he married you," she said to her once.

"I took him for better, for worse, grannie, and did my best, but I often failed. He had to have patience with me too, and before very long we grew into a true friendship and affection. No one ever cared for me as he did, and I have lost him. It is more than eight months ago, and it is as fresh as yesterday."

"Your experience has gone beyond mine, though it is short in years. I was seventeen —only seventeen—when I married your grandfather, and God has graciously permitted that we should grow old together. You are very handsome still, my dear, and have a long life before you. I hope your boy improves?"

"He is a dear, good boy to me, grannie. I don't wish him better. I have that blessing left, I thank God, or the long life before me would seem a very vain and empty thing."

Lady Daventry was touched. She said: "Poor Delia, you fancy you have done with pride—but it dies hard, poor human pride. It rears its crest to the last out of the fog of our miseries."

Delia rose from her seat, and walked through the great parlour to the ante-room, and came back again, straightening her tall figure, and stepping statelily, as if with a

physical effort of resistance to the weariness and dejection that stole over her. Cricket was in his customary place in the bay-window. He followed his sister with his eyes, and as she returned up the room he glanced significantly from her to the portrait of the French Madam over the mantelpiece.

"No, Cricket, between then and now there is a great gulf fixed," she said blushing—but the likeness was still very like despite her weeds.

It must have been *very* like, for the judge, whose mind let slip recent events to recall those of former years that were more deeply branded, once, at waking up from his afternoon nap, spoke to her as if she were still the Delia of her lustrous girlhood, and he her loving grandfather, not yet aggrieved by her untoward behaviour and rough wooing. Delia

was fain to smile at what trivialities had been of chief importance then.

"A rose-coloured bow or a red rose becomes you best with a black dress, and a white cap on a young lady's head I do not admire—oblige me, my dear, by removing it. You have beautiful hair—why cover it? Time enough to hide your hair if you are ever so unhappy as to lose a good husband, and become a widow."

"I am a widow now, gran'papa," Delia said softly. "Poor old man, he does not hear," she added with exceeding pitifulness.

No, he did not hear, or he did not notice. "Your Cousin Fanny is to marry Mr. James Herrick of Knowle. That is famous promotion for Fan. Yes, my dear, and some day, I hope, as fine a fellow as Jem Herrick will be on his knees to you."

"I chose for myself, gran'papa, and I did

not choose ill. I married Mr. Denys of Cote," Delia said with gentle distinctness.

The judge gazed at her in sorrowful perplexity: "Did you, indeed? I don't remember it. You were worthy of as good a gentleman as ever stepped, and Mr. Denys of Cote was one of a very unfortunate family. What became of him?"

"He is dead, gran'papa; I am in mourning for him," Delia answered, her lips trembling, her eyes filling with tears.

"Dead, is he? Well, my dear, don't cry—death comes to all of us, and there is a blessing in your face for some good man yet."

Another day, when he was stronger, the judge talked to Delia's mother about her. It could not fail but that he should, in recent years, have become impressed by the growth of her character, and the impression was permanent. For a long time past he had loved

her and believed in her more than she knew, or than he had ever said until now to her mother.

"That poor daughter of yours grieves sadly —it is on my conscience that I have been unkind to her. Bid her come to me."

Delia came with a more cheerful countenance—to what profit was it that she vexed his pathetic senility with her tears? She had put off the white coif he disliked, and sat down on a lower seat by his chair, displaying a handful of spring flowers.

"I have been in the garden, gran'papa. The sweet old Banksia rose will soon be in blossom all over the wall, and some of the lilies are out," she said. "I should like to lend you my arm, and let you see the pretty show they make in the sun."

"You are Delia whom the boys used to call Mistress Pride—that is now many years

ago?" he murmured, regarding her wistfully. "But no matter the years—it was in another life."

Delia disposed her flowers afresh, swift recollection running to and fro, and tarrying in many a vanished scene.

Her grandfather continued: "Sleep is coy with us old people, Delia. I lie awake of nights very long, and last night in the small hours I fell a-thinking of Navestock. For the good done in that lost place, they say that *you* are most to be thanked. They say that you were the beginning of it, and Sir Oliver Denys was munificent because he had faith in you. There was a difficult work to be accomplished, and he discerned that you had powers equal to its success."

"That is more than justice to me, gran'papa, and for that reason it must be less than justice to some one else," Delia answered. "I should

like to show you his picture." She went quickly, and brought that miniature of her husband which had been his last gift to her, and the judge put on his spectacles to look at it.

"Artists of genius are seers. This face tells more and better of its owner than his life ever showed, Delia," was his criticism.

"It was the face I knew him by, gran'papa. Love is a seer too. And of all that was done at Navestock, nothing would have been done had not the possibilities that portrait hints at become actualities. I was full of foolishness and vanities when I married Mr. Denys, but I never ceased to pray God that He would so turn the pity of it that we might thank Him for bringing us together. And He did. I had great and bitter trouble. There were times when I lay down with the feelings of a poor prisoner who has gone to his trial in the morn-

ing with sanguine hopes of acquittal, and sees the door of the condemned cell shut on him at night. And my trouble was not for myself, but for others whom I could not help—which was worse to bear. There was nothing for it but patience, striving after duty, and loving more. It was not until I lost my little son—you remember Willie?—that my husband's heart was truly touched and turned. But after that—after that—oh, gran'papa, I tire you—and it is all over—it is all over." She broke down, weeping aloud.

"Hush, Delia, hush, my dear," whispered her grandfather, greatly moved. "You have another son. I am very sorry I did you wrong. The old judge stands at the bar himself, and pronounces his own sentence. He was unjust, but God is righteous, who holds the balance. Gather up your flowers that you have let fall, and go into the air. I am tired, as you say,

and will take a little rest. Kiss me, my dear, and forget, if you can, that ever we were not friends."

Delia gathered up her flowers, and retreated to the garden again. She had her miniature, and a letter from Hughie that morning to read over, and she had other things to ponder on besides. She sat down under the cedars where her mother joined her; and presently from next door came the rector, and said that he was going in for his few daily minutes to see the judge.

"I left him half an hour ago trying to sleep a little," Delia mentioned. "He was stronger, and we had a good talk, but he tired soon." She was wondering at herself, and yet feeling happier since that "good talk" than she had felt for many months.

The rector stayed and chatted on: "We have had James Herrick over this afternoon.

James looks less jaded than he did at the beginning of the Easter holidays, but Fan says truly that ambition pays a heavy toll at every step on its road to honour. They go to London to-morrow, just when the spring is in its beauty, and Knowle most charming."

"Don't let Cousin Fan complain. James Herrick's ambition is pure and lofty. Life should be full of interest for her," Delia said, with a flash of her animated youthful manner. The rector thought that she was but little altered in all these years. The eager tone, the kindling eye, the commanding look—all were evoked at the suggestion of high hopes and noble deeds, and the brave heart beat in unison.

"My dear," said her mother, "I see Cricket making signs to us from the window. I fear that something has happened."

Delia turned and looked that way, then rose

and went in haste towards the house. She knew what had happened. The judge was dead—had died in his chair, in the attitude of sleep as she left him.

"So soon! so suddenly!" she cried.

"No, dear, neither soon, nor suddenly. In God's good time, and full of years and honours."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SEEKING SYMPATHY.

"Each trial has its weight, which whoso bears
Knows his own woe."

J. H. NEWMAN.

THE death of Sir John Daventry was the first breach in the three generations who had lived together in the House with Golden Gables, but though it was a sorrow it had none of the sting of death. His old wife was soon to follow him, and Mrs. Denys loved to think of it afterwards for its peacefulness, and the words of perfect charity that were his last to her.

Some words of her father were less replete with comfort. It was a pity, but Delia could not rest quiet without endeavouring to get from him *more justice for Hughie's father*, as

she put it, *for Hughie's sake.* No one else at Auldcaster had appreciated the real ground of her complaint, but to him she tried to make it clear. Mr. Daventry was cool, and not too grave about it, but sincere, as the best way to cauterise the soreness which laid her open to constant chafing.

He said: "Hughie must bear his share of the burden, and I have no doubt that self-love will help him as it has helped his mother. I am bound to believe that Mr. Denys had some grand qualities, and some qualities very endearing in private life, but his errors were not hidden, and I continue of opinion that those gentlemen were right who objected to receive him amongst them as a magistrate on the bench. A severe mortification to him it must have been."

"I never heard of it, papa," Delia said, a blush overspreading her face suddenly.

"It was so, my dear. I regret that you should have heard it now, as Mr. Denys kept it from you. It was soon after you went to Cote." They were silent, Delia looking down, not knowing what to answer; her father not caring to speak further lest he should hurt her more; for her painful blush burned on.

With some keenness, she said at length: "Those gentlemen must have departed from their rigorous traditions, and have become more lax since, I think, papa, if they were the magistrates who sit at Rowborough."

"They were gentlemen of the county bench who meet at Beauminster, Delia."

"Even amongst the gentlemen of the county bench I could mention one or more who are not conspicuous examples of honour and sagacity. I have been astonished myself how they got there. Perhaps political influence had a hand in it."

"Political influence has to do with these appointments, and men are too often put in the commission who have given no proofs of capacity. Mr. Denys' political influence was considerable, and would have given him a high standing had he brought a fair personal record into his new neighbourhood. The world looks on the surface of a man's life, and does not look far below the surface, Delia. It is a truism to say that there are worse rogues at large than any shut up in prison—all the law can answer is that they have not ventured within the sphere of its activity. Mr. Denys reckoned no friends in the county of the best sort until he subdued prejudice by his administration of the Navestock estates. When Hughie arrives at a man's understanding of what his father did at Navestock, what he did unworthily elsewhere will not vex him much. You would not wish your boy to believe a

lie, or to call wrong right while his character is forming? Then let him face the wrong brought within his ken, and know it for wrong, and take account, on the other side, of what was large-hearted, and learn to do it."

Delia would have persisted in the argument, but Mr. Daventry felt that no satisfaction to her could ever come of it, and said in a tone of wearied remonstrance: "You cannot bring back yesterday, Delia, and I think you will consult your own dignity by raising no question of events and circumstances that are long past and unalterable."

"Is my husband's honour to be nothing to me?" she rejoined imperiously.

Her father looked at her, but said no more. His look was sufficiently impressive to silence his daughter.

Mrs. Denys returned to Cote a few days

after the judge's funeral. Hugh Oliver had come from Rugby to attend it, and went home with his mother. There was the consecration of the new church to look forward to at Whitsuntide, when the "young squire" was to take his own place, and present his own gift —the communion plate. The ceremonial was shorn of no observance or splendour customary on such occasions, and Mrs. Denys was present at the service with her son. But that was all. The breakfast for the bishop was given at the rectory, and Hughie went with Mr. Orme, leaving his mother solitary, unless for her fancies and imaginings, which grew into an agony of heartache as she recalled what had been her happy anticipations of that day, and contrasted them with its sad realities of bereavement and mourning.

Early in the afternoon Lady Herrick, coming from the rectory to give her an account

of the breakfast, found her in her boudoir bitterly weeping, and the flood was not to be stayed. This old friend had loved Delia from the time when she believed that Delia had loved her son Jem mistakenly. She sat by her, and was still while grief had its way, and then with tender, steady touch applied the remedy that the wound needed. Delia's reserve was quite broken down, and she poured out her heart to Lady Herrick craving for sympathy, as she might have done to her mother.

"It seems so cruel—I can scarcely bear to think of him for pity! It does not matter now—he does not feel it any longer—but that Hughie should have angry, shame-faced thoughts of his father who was never anything but good to him!" she burst out passionately. "It is so easy to blame—it is not so easy to understand. People look at what was done

amiss—they don't look at the amends—they don't know of the remorse. And Hughie is shy in speaking of his father, like all the rest. He just reddens and looks down, and says nothing—when a word of kindness would have been of all the comfort in the world to me to-day!"

"I am sorry you missed it, Delia, but I hope you are a little unjust to Hughie," Lady Herrick said with quiet expostulation. "Hughie is inarticulate yet—speech and spirit. My boys at the same age were dumb, unless under extreme pressure. If Hughie could give his thoughts tongue, I don't believe they would hurt you. But you are his mother, and he is very reverent of you, which I like to see."

"I could bear anything better than his avoidance of his father's name. He seems confused at any reference to him—and yet I'm sure

they loved one another dearly. Perhaps that is *why*—he is afraid of a blow on his shrinking heart. He was wretched at having to go to the breakfast at the rectory this morning—he just said: 'I suppose I must go, mother?'"

"Oh, boys are incomprehensible mortals: by this time he is glad he went. I assure you he enjoyed his lobster-salad, and looked very bonny and animated with his blue eyes intent on the speakers. He will be able to report to you all he heard—and that was nothing but good words of his father, and true words too, Delia; for, indeed, dear, your husband did in Cote and at Navestock what his son may take a joyful pride in remembering. It would be well if everybody had such a set-off to show for their own and their forefathers' blunders as Mr. Denys in his last years."

Delia began to listen, and to sigh with an

air of weariness and relief. "Then there was nothing to pain my boy?" she asked.

"Not a word. Colonel Hayman gave his old comrade his due, and poor Mr. Midas, after hanging his lip at the praise of his neighbour, to the wonder of us all stood up and blurted out an endorsement. Some fellows, he said, might have taken example by Denys, who called him not fit for their company. Some fellows' sins went before them to judgment, and some fellows' they followed after. Denys had taken his whips like a man in his lifetime, and he didn't doubt but the recording angel had dropt a tear for him at his death. What he wished to say of Denys was what most men might say of themselves—if he had known better he would have done better, and, at all events, he had founded that church they had been consecrating. Let a man never despair; while there was life there was hope; and it

was never too late to mend. Oh, it was a very queer little speech, indeed. The bishop made himself acquainted with the engraved figures on his wine-glass; and the rector, who is at his best on these genial occasions, applauded with the tears in his eyes. *His* testimony to his old squire was perfect, as his little tender speeches always are."

Mrs. Denys was gratified, but, perhaps, she would rather have heard that her husband's encomium had been pronounced by Sir Thomas Britton and endorsed by Sir John Herrick. Hughie did not discriminate so narrowly, and would have felt grateful to the poorest and meanest man alive who mentioned his father with respect. He came home presently, and bounded up the stairs three steps at once to his mother's door. She opened it to see him the quicker—his face contented was the most precious blessing left her. They

sat down side by side — his arm was round her.

"I wish you had been there, mother. Everybody wanted to know about you—everybody was very kind," he said hurriedly. "I should have been twice as happy with you there."

"Who made the finest speech, Hughie?" Lady Herrick inquired, standing up to leave them.

"The bishop—I recollect his best because it was the shortest, and Sir Thomas Britton told me to thank him for it."

"And what did you say, Hughie? But I will leave you to tell your mother by your two selves what you said, and Sir John shall tell the story to me as we drive home to Danesmore."

Hughie made rather what he called "a mull" of his report, but his mother under-

stood that he had come back to her quit for good and all of that unhappy self-consciousness which had made him so shy of encountering strangers. He had determined to hold up his head, and look the world in the face again.

"If I am as good a man all round as my father was——" he began. His mother laid her hand softly on his to stop him.

"Hughie, it is not your father who must be your standard and example—talk to Mr. Orme—but you know *better*," she said, with lips that quivered, and tearful eyes pleading with him to have patience. "Let me speak to you a little now, and then let us try to have done with those things that are so painful for us both to remember, and think only of those that deserve all love and honour. You know how your father planned to repair one wrong he did, but I think he foresaw on the

night he died that much of his planning would come to nothing. He wished John to have Acklam—but John will have none of Acklam."

"I am glad of that, mother; I like Acklam myself," Hughie interrupted, offering a kiss. "If Captain Meade took New Place, and John took Acklam, Kitty Consett and I would have to roost in a tree when we are married, unless you would give us lodgings at the Manor House." His spirits had got up again, and he wanted an instant truce with tears and troubles.

Mrs. Denys' faint attempt at remonstrance ended in a gentle laugh. Hughie's change of mood was great consolation. "I was not aware that Kitty Consett and you were engaged," she said. "When you are married you shall have lodgings at the Manor House; or—as it will be a long day first—I may have vacated it before."

"I hope not that, mother," Hughie responded with exceeding gravity. "If you are not there, the bells shall not ring at my wedding, I vow!" and the kiss that his mother had restrained until this moment was administered with an emphasis that forbade the return of the clouds.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A DECISION.

" ' Be strong to-day :' but, Lord, to-morrow—
What of to-morrow, Lord ? "

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

YOUNG Denys had referred to Captain Meade's taking New Place as to an event not accomplished yet.

Captain Meade was a slack wooer as it seemed, but, in truth, he had received small encouragement to press his suit. Marie-Irene was not accessible under her brother John's roof, and he had not seen her since that brief interview at the Manor House shortly after Christmas. The young lady came down to Cote again in August, when her masters

also left town, but she brought her occupations with her, and was not idly inclined for trifling. No frame could have been less propitious than that in which Captain Meade saw her next—absorbed in study, wearing a look of absence and restraint, not interested in any affairs that he had to tell her. She possessed in a marked degree that trait of her father by which he had enforced upon his nearest and dearest a silent respect for his reserves; and when Captain Meade intimated to Mrs. Denys a wish that his way could be paved for him, she said that, indeed, she could not speak to the girl.

Mrs. Denys believed, but was not sure, that John had done so; for in moments of rest Marie-Irene had an air of soft, pensive regret that found no expression in words. The first anniversary of Mr. Denys' death was spent by both in seclusion, and no step had

been taken then either towards fulfilling or rescinding his promise of New Place to Captain Meade. Mr. Quorn waited for instructions, and received none, but that he must continue to wait. In October Marie-Irene was to return to John's house in London, and the sentiment was general, that she could not be allowed to return without some understanding for the future. Captain Meade sought to persuade his mother to come to Cote; and failing that, he asked that Marie-Irene might be invited to Updeane. And this was contrived without formality. Mrs. Denys took her to Beauminster for the purpose of revisiting her friends at the convent, and another day they drove over the hills to Updeane.

Mrs. Meade received the young lady with a blush on her faded cheek. She had heard of her beauty and grace, but had never pictured to herself the perfect beauty and sweet

grace she saw. The moment was nervous for her, but evidently there was no disquietude in the girl's mind. Mrs. Denys felt on the instant that she knew everything, and that her line of behaviour had been pre-arranged. Marie-Irene blushed too, and passing an old piano that stood in the spacious low hall open, just touched the keys—a trick she had whenever she came near a musical instrument—and said it was well placed for sound.

That remark was the text of the conversation that followed—music at home and abroad, music in the convent chapel, with illustrations and singing.

"You will sing for my mother?" Captain Meade whispered, and then sighed. Marie-Irene consented with alacrity—it made the time go.

Mrs. Denys sat with Mrs. Meade side by side on a stiff sofa at the farther end of the

dim room. They were almost strangers, and found not much to say. Presently a servant brought coffee, and after that Captain Meade proposed to show the visitors the garden, and a certain fine point of view. It resulted in Marie-Irene accompanying him alone. In the course of their saunter they had what served for an explanation. Captain Meade saw so little ground of hope that he spoke from a faint heart, and Marie-Irene had scarcely to speak at all to quell him finally.

To Mrs. Denys, when inquired of afterwards, she said: "He does not care enough for me—I do not care enough for him. John thought it right to warn me last Christmas, and I have been on my guard since. There was a time, a year ago, when I could easily have fancied myself in love, but that is over, and papa's scheme for restoring Navestock to the family who were robbed of it by his

wicked ancestors does not depend on my yea or nay to Captain Meade."

"No dear, but is it over—in very truth—that time when you could easily have fancied yourself in love?" Mrs. Denys said, tenderly adjuring her; for there was a changeful colour on the girl's face, and a shining in her eyes that betrayed, perhaps, a deeper feeling.

Marie-Irene shook away a few tears, laughing, and employing some of those pretty gestures that seem to make light of serious incidents. "Things may pass, and we may be a little sorry, and yet not wish them to stay," she said. "I never expect to see a nobler gentleman than Captain Meade, and *but for this and for that which all the world knows*, I think I might have loved him. It would need a very strong love between us to bear the strain, and as there is not the strong love, we have said good-bye and parted friends.

I shall have a life of my own amongst artists, who will not ask whence I come, but what I am, and what I can do. Oh, I shall be happy. I have no fear but I shall be happy."

"Indeed, dear, I hope you will."

This was in the window of the old inn overlooking Beauminster Close where they were to remain that night. Marie-Irene turned aside, and lifted her face to the sky. Mrs. Denys saw that her mouth trembled, and her tears were brimming over again.

"It is permitted you to be a little sorry, dear. It is a long while since you first saw Captain Meade, and you became well acquainted last summer," she said very gently.

"Yes. Last summer was delightful altogether till it came to its sad end. The sun never shone after that day for ever so many days. But it returned at length, and I was

pleased to see it. When one is young, sunshine seems most natural."

"I trust you will have a great share of it, dear."

"Do you remember how you wrote to me in the convent of what was happening to Captain Meade away in India? We used to talk about that battle where he was wounded, and that skirmishing retreat in which he won his Cross of Valour. Their names were in the map. Oh, he was quite our hero; and that is what he is—a hero. Probably he will rejoin the army. That will be an eclipse for his poor mother, who blushed when she took my hand. I know what that meant, and if I had let my heart go, it would have been piteous."

To Mrs. Denys' perception it was piteous even now, without the sacrifice of a lost heart. It had never occurred to her before that Marie-Irene would take account of her birth

as a barrier against this marriage that her father had desired. But she did, and sympathised evidently with the view of it adverse to herself.

Mrs. Denys ventured to speak again: "If you loved Captain Meade warmly and truly, his mother would forget all else," she said.

Marie-Irene answered: "*No.* Her son is like a king to her. I think he is like a king to me too—and it is not to a king you bring a mean gift. Though I loved him with all my heart and soul, it would be better that I should go away weeping than that he should lead me amongst honourable women as his wife, ashamed of what I am. I could not bear that, and keep *good*."

Mrs. Denys understood her, and was silent. To be humble, and take the lower place, was easy to this nature rich in talents, relying on the perpetual springs of joy within itself. She

looked behind her at what her own life had been—how established in pride, how besieged with humiliations—and consented that Marie-Irene had decided well, though her decision was the heaviest reproach of all to her father's memory.

CHAPTER L.

GRIEVING DOWN.

"Shall there be rest from toil, be truce from sorrow,
Be living green upon the sward?"

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

MRS. DENYS' grief sank into a more natural key after the day of the consecration of the new church. The wounds of her pride slowly healed, and the numerous occupations that she gave herself preserved her from further unwholesome brooding over the past, the lost, and the irretrievable. Her youthfulness, her energy remained, her enjoyment of society revived. The minor vexations of life resumed their power to vex her again, which was a healthy sign to her friends.

It had been decided between the late squire and the rector that when the new church was opened for Divine service the old church should be disused, unless on summer Sundays in the season when Cote was full of visitors and the other overcrowded; and this was carried out. It had also been pretty generally understood that when the rector got that canonry at Beauminster which was expected to be vacant soon, he would resign the living of Cote in favour of Mr. Orme. But before the canonry was vacant, Mr. Clarges had re-considered his position, and when he was promoted to his new dignity he did not find that the retention of his benefice was incompatible with it. Cote was a very pleasant place to live in, combining many advantages, and the pastoral work was easy. Also Mrs. Clarges was fond of her pretty old house and garden, and did not wish to leave the neighbourhood of her own family at Marsh-

leas. The rector stayed therefore, and Mr. Orme stayed too, and everybody was well pleased to keep them both, though it was foreseen that the arrangement might not last long which curtailed the independence of the popular curate, who had been looking forward to have the benefice for his own.

And it did not last long. Amongst the Whitsuntide-holiday visitors to Cote was a stranger who had much to do with honours and benefices, and who, as he left the new church on the Sunday evening, when Mr. Orme had preached the sermon, said to a friend, with a backward sign of the hand towards the pulpit: "Front bench form that." No doubt he made himself better acquainted with the antecedents and characteristics of the clergyman, the simplicity and vigour of whose address had fired his admiration; for within a few months a London parish was given to

Mr. Orme, from which his predecessor had been translated to a bishopric.

Mrs. Denys felt the removal of her own friend and her son's friend as a personal loss and trial, and, giving way to a momentary petulance, hoped that Mr. Clarges would not turn his church into a convalescent hospital again, for his sick and weary brethren, to the detriment of Cote—a form of charity at the expense of his congregation, to which once he had been prone. Cote was very sensible of what it was losing, but it was firmly established in reputation now, and did not visibly suffer in the ensuing season, though the new curate fell far short of the gentleman he followed. And in London Mrs. Denys could enjoy, if she pleased, the ministrations that were the most useful to her; for her house there, which she had no intention of giving up, was in Mr. Orme's parish.

This event was probably the beginning of Mrs. Denys' living more in London and less at Cote than formerly. Cote ran its course of development rapidly after the beautiful new church was finished. It elected a Local Board—taken collectively, the nine men of most weight and substance in the place; and it elected a School Board who firmly declined the succour of ladies, whether in their counsels or their schools, unless for the superintendence of needle-work—a grievance from which Miss Nancy Clarges never rallied, but to which Mrs. Denys resigned herself as to one of those inevitable things that she knew must come. She was not above accepting the humble duty that was left them, and went pretty regularly once a week to the girls' school of an afternoon, administering encouragement and rebuke as they seemed to be needed. Also (but under correction) she gave

assistance—turned down hems and tacked seams.

"We don't call it seaming now, ma'am; we say *sewing*," an intelligent little body kindly informed her.

"Oh, *sewing*," Mrs. Denys whispered with her sweet smile.

"We don't put in the sleeve like that, ma'am; we do it *this way*," the same child instructed her again in the most friendly manner.

Miss Nancy Clarges, missing her occupation, took a lesson from the younger lady, and condescended to the lowest place—the infant school—all that remained for her. It went to her heart not to have leave to tell the little children Bible-stories and teach them hymns, but it could not be allowed. A one-handed man on the board objected that it would be the small end of the wedge. Miss Nancy referred to him afterwards as the *one-eyed* man

—but that made no difference. She had the knitting assigned to her when that useful art was introduced by and by, but religious or other lessons never any.

"It is what we call *progress*, Nancy, and whether you like it or not, I am powerless to hinder it. We must obey the law," said her brother, and Miss Nancy was finally answered; but the word *progress* had for her subsequently as bad a meaning as it had for Richard Blythe on a memorable sad occasion which the rector did not forget.

Prizes were abolished when the old-fashioned committee was exchanged for the newfangled board, and bobs and curtseys to your betters went next. The shopkeepers raised their hats now instead of touching the brim, and retired tradesmen dubbed themselves gentlemen. The ancients, Tories to the backbone, were dying off, with other obsolete civilities; and the

moderns, with laudable liberal enterprise, founded gas-works — that beautiful invention that was to put gas out hanging fire up in London yet. The new church adopted the gas at once, and the Local Board decreed by a triumphant majority that the district should be lighted in the more populous parts—the lamps to be extinguished at ten o'clock. From this it was but one step more to a water-cart and a dust-cart. On the day that the water-cart traversed the Green Square for the first time Miss Nancy Clarges met it full in face, and read painted distinctly thereon, TOWN CART.

"The village is gone! the dear old village is gone!" she murmured aloud, standing still on the edge of the pavement, and looking after the cart with eyes dimmer than it was their nature to be.

A numerous *cortège* of little active boys followed in the wake of the cart, taking the

utmost pains to get their feet wetted with the novel rainfall. "Of course, the boys will turn it to mischief if they can," Miss Nancy testily remarked; but she did not dream of calling them to order as it would have been once her duty and delight to do.

"A fire-engine, and we're complete," an affable voice observed, and drew up to the lady. It was the prosperous purveyor of the staff of life to the million, who had issued from his shop, in front of which she stood. "You are admiring the water-cart, ma'am — in my humble opinion, if I may mention it, the water-cart is an institootion that Cote has been long enough without in warm and dusty weather. The Local Board has done their dooty in this respect at last, and we must do *our* dooty, and keep 'em up to the mark, until they purvide the town with a sootable engine in case of fire."

"You do make a terrible smoke to be sure, but I hope we shall have no fire breaking out, Mr. Mealy," Miss Nancy replied with considerable tartness. "To have fire breaking out would be the last straw added to our burdens; and if I were the Local Board, my next act should be the precaution of making you burn your own smoke."

Mr. Mealy retired into his shop.

Progressing at this pace, Cote made great advances during another year, and no one person or family seemed any longer indispensable to its comfort, its well-doing, or its popularity. Mrs. Denys stayed away the next season, and she was not seriously missed, unless by her circle of private friends. She would not have held her receptions in the Dutch garden had she remained at the Manor House, being still in mourning; and after a few weeks

at the beginning of Hughie's holidays, to give him the benefit of the sea-air, she took Phœbe and went abroad with him, travelling through France to Switzerland, which was to be the play-ground of several of their connections and family friends that autumn.

Mr. Orme had accepted holiday duty for a month at a beautiful spot in the mountains beyond Lucerne, to which resorted chiefly English visitors who loved seclusion, and to keep out of the main tide of tourists. Mrs. Denys and Hughie directed their course thither, and finding it charming and not ill placed for excursions, remained there as long as Mr. Orme remained—it had been so arranged, indeed, before they went. Young Denys had a very cordial affection for his early instructor, and permitted him to exercise a tutorial influence and authority over him still. He was fifteen now, a great fellow,

growing more like his father every year, and needing often a strong hand to curb him, and guide him straight; for he had the same inborn notion that he was to rule and not obey, to love and be submitted to, that were such leading traits in Mr. Denys, and his mother began to find him occasionally difficult of control.

No one who knew Mrs. Denys intimately but expected that collisions would occur between them as Hugh Oliver grew up and left boyhood behind him. She loved her son with devotion, but was scarcely tolerant enough of his independent humours. Hughie loved his mother very fondly in return, but he loved his own way a good deal too, and was hard to convince that she might know best when it was necessary that one or the other should yield. Since the main responsibility of his training had devolved upon her,

Mrs. Denys had shown a vein of the Spartan mother, and would rather have seen him lying dead before her than that he should have outraged her code of honour. She wanted him to be perfect with a perfectness far above out of his reach, and used occasionally a tone of severity or contempt when he made light of his own fallings short, which was a pity, for it rather overstept the mark of prudence.

The people at Cote had begun to call the young squire a regular chip of the old block. He was true to his word, good or bad, stubborn in prejudice, and frank in defiance, as ever the old squire had been. His blue eyes learned the same thunderous look in anger, and his lips the same taciturn habit where he had feelings to hold in reserve for another day. Mr. Clarges was afraid that he would give his widowed mother trouble, but Mr.

Orme quelled her anxieties with the hopeful assurance that strong characters, firmly and kindly exercised in youth, though wilful and turbulent and hard to manage, were yet found to anneal well, and to bear the rough usage of the world more bravely than characters of softer fibre. Mrs. Denys attached weight to all Mr. Orme said, and sought her direction and support from his lips often. He was an excellent friend for her son, and for herself an invaluable adviser.

Up here too amongst the mountains he was a good comrade for the boy, whose fine spirit was also a refreshment to himself. Hughie was over bold and venturesome, and thoroughly appreciated an expedition spiced with just so much of risk and difficulty as compelled him to put forth all his strength and endurance in surmounting them; and the knowledge that he was in Mr. Orme's company saved his mother

from those wearing distresses in his absence that would otherwise have afflicted her. Mr. Walter Daventry, who passed by this way on his wedding-tour, found the arrangement admirable, and so reported of it at Auldcaster on his return to England—adding an intimation that he foresaw a probability of it becoming a permanent arrangement. Walter's bride was Juliet, Mr. Orme's youngest sister. Their courtship had brought the two families into a close and intimate friendship, and their marriage was regarded with favour on all sides.

Looking backward from the high levels of middle life, the past falls into perspectives that were never thought of while the ground was being travelled over. Looking onward, there seems still a long way to go. Mrs. Denys had come to these high levels. The road behind her was checkered, and more with shade than sunshine, but the neutral haze of distance was

fast toning down both, and the joy and the sorrow of it, the pity and the anger, were being softened and fused together in emotionless memory, as the flowery fields, the bare steeps, the waving woods of the early hours are blended in the purple dimness of the after-day. The road in front was straight and even, but lonely. And it need not be lonely. There was a blessing in her face for some good man yet, and there was one who ardently aspired to possess it. No one had perhaps ever so thoroughly learned and appreciated Mrs. Denys' distinction of character as Mr. Orme had done during the seven years of his curacy at Cote. Yet half her nature had never had its development. On the side of patience, fortitude, forbearance, tenderness, she was well-nigh perfect, but her proud, fond devotion, her high hopes, her enthusiasms, had gone unfed. She practised no deceptions on herself here.

She felt the same desire to be and to do as she had felt in her girlish day-dreams, but the desire was purified of vain ambition, and opportunity would never be wanting if she were pleased to take this new departure in life with Mr. Orme. She had a struggle with herself, but the moment she hesitated the result was not doubtful. "For Hughie's sake," she said. But it was for her own sake too, or Mr. Orme could hardly have been satisfied. Perhaps she wanted some plea in excuse of the new spring of love in her heart.

Mr. Orme bore a strong likeness to Sir Oliver Denys. He was as tall and spare as the old merchant, and his countenance was as fine both in feature and expression. He had a likeness in disposition also—the same Christian simplicity, and the same generous breadth of view, with those points of difference that would naturally arise from their

difference of training and vocation. He possessed great powers of work, and that organising faculty by which a busy man keeps his work well in hand, and his mind free from overmuch anxiety for its success. Both before and since his removal to London he had found in Mrs. Denys his most sympathising and effectual helper, and during the last year, through their constant association in labours of love and charity, they had seemed to grow almost necessary to each other. He knew and was sure that she would be a sufficient helpmeet for him, and she was not able finally to refuse him her loving service. When she returned to Cote in September, she summoned the heads of her family to the Manor House. The three years of her mourning were ended, and the announcement that she had to make to them was neither unexpected nor unwelcome.

Mr. Orme was staying at the rectory, and he dined at the Manor House on the evening of Mr. and Mrs. Daventry's arrival. Afterwards, when the elder people rested in Delia's window, somewhat weary with their journey, but enjoying the beautiful, serene prospect, the others went down into the Dutch garden. Years were beginning to tell on Mrs. Daventry, and she presently closed her eyes. She was roused by her husband saying in his dry tone: "Remarkable people women are." She looked out, and saw coming up the long turfed walk in the midst of the garden Delia leaning on the arm of Mr. Orme. Hughie held her fast by the other hand.

"What does it mean?" she said—but, of course, the picture told its own story.

It meant that a few weeks later Mrs. Denys of Cote ceased to be, and was changed by the giving and receiving of another marriage-ring

into the wife of the Reverend Basil Orme, rector of St. Mary-in-Bush, that great metropolitan parish to which he had gone from the little iron church at Cote.

CHAPTER LI.

CONSOLED.

"Spring sang of heaven ; the summer flowers
Bade me gaze on, and did not fade ;
Even suns o'er autumn bowers
Heard my strong wish, and stayed."

J. H. NEWMAN.

SINCE the last summer Cote Church rejoices in a fine peal of bells. There are no such silvery, sweet-toned bells in the peninsula as the bells of Cote. Mr. Denys had left it in his will that a certain sum of money should be laid by every year until his son's coming of age, when the bells were to be cast, and hung in the tower. Beyond that his written instructions

did not go; but Hugh Oliver had kept in mind his father's promise that they should be had in time to ring at his wedding, and not before, and he contrived so that they were rung first on that auspicious day.

The young squire married Kitty Consett. It was a very early marriage on both sides. They had just nine-and-thirty years between them—seventeen of the years being Kitty's. Some people called it foolishly premature, but Hughie, borrowing a judicious phrase from the old rector to pacify his mother with, said, "Each case must be taken on its own merits;" and as he had nobody's consent to sue for but Kitty's, the wedding was celebrated when, where, and how he determined.

Kitty had grown up tall and straight as a wand, and with a very winning, pleasant countenance. She had not the imposing

beauty of Hughie's mother, but she had a gracious loveliness, a bright wit, a singing voice, and plenty of pluck on horseback—gifts that her lover helped to cultivate for the lively admiration he had of her and of them long before they were of age to marry. Kitty had, moreover, an intelligent submissiveness of temper very desirable in the wife of a man of peremptory, affectionate disposition, and his mother gave him up to her with quiet confidence.

Hughie had spent three years at Cambridge after leaving Rugby, and in the long vacations had taken hard runs in the way of travel as a preparation for the soberer paces of life at the Manor House. For it was there the young squire set up his household gods, in the midst of the people amongst whom he was born, and who paid him a natural defer-

ence, though Cote had long out-grown the simple loyalty that governs the minds and manners of a purely agricultural population. He did something to deserve their regard. He took heed that through no negligence or narrowness of his was the town which had begun so well overweighted with rates and taxes in the later phases of its development. By his father's timely concessions it had been kept out of debt, and at the same time power had been kept in the right hands. The *Newsboy* died of inanition after eighteen months' pining, and Canon Clarges was elected chairman of the School Board—quite the proper person, though rather perverse and dilatory in business. However, he was dextrously managed by seeming to give way to him.

Of course, difficulties and differences of opinion crop up now and then. When the

lease dropped of that triangular price of ground where Crispin's shop stood at the entering into the town from Marshleas, the young squire proposed that his father's plan of a workman's club should be carried out, and was met with a discouraging lukewarmness. When a deputation waited upon him to state their views, he heard them with courtesy and consideration, and then answered that there the land was, and the stone and the timber were at their call whenever they could agree to raise the building; but as for a subsidy in support of it, they must look for none from him—they must cultivate independence, and rely on their own efforts. They went away grumbling, but the young squire did not know that, and would not have been moved by it had he known. Probably from the care given to their housing in Cote, no urgent

need of the club is felt, for it is not founded yet—clubs are for people with abundance of leisure, and working people in Cote have not that inconvenience. A drinking-fountain and trough for cattle have been placed on the spot; the decayed structures have been cleared off the ground, and trees planted, under the shadow of which the old men smoke their summer evening pipes. Mr. Midas tells his young friend Denys that it is monstrous waste of a splendid site, and his co-partners, the great brewers at Rowborough, have again and again offered a tempting price for it, but young Mr. Denys calmly says them nay, and renders no reason. Once a cry was raised against him as overbearing and harsh in refusing to let a public-house be established in that part of the town where the labouring people chiefly lived; and to quell it he built,

close on the outskirts, a plain stone house, with a cricket-ground, bowling-green, and alley for quoits attached. He furnished a large upper room where newspapers could be seen, took out a six-days' license in his own name, and put in a manager, who being made aware of the gentry with a weakness for strong drink, was given to understand that they must be allowed to keep sober for him, else he would not be fit for his place. If anybody wants to get drunk at Cote, it has been so contrived that he shall do it under difficulties, or not at all.

This has cut off at their source other beginnings of crime. Petty peculation has almost ceased since the temptation to get money to drink anyhow has been taken away. The old beer-shop asked no questions where the garden-stuff was grown, where the eggs were laid, where the chickens were hatched that

were brought to market at its bar. Lady householders congratulate themselves now that expensive seed potatoes come up according to sample, and that giant marrow-pease are no longer miraculously thinned out by the birds. They are suffered to gather their own fruit, and the very pigeons have lost the migratory character for which once they were notorious. The policeman gets no more anonymous petitions to keep an eye on such and such gardens and hen-roosts between Saturday night and Sunday morning, with an earnest request to give the thief a fright if he comes, but by no means to put the owners of the property to worse trouble by catching him; and for a Cote man to be brought up before the Rowborough bench has become quite a rare event.

Young Mr. Denys calls himself a Conserva-

tive. He is a Conservative of the most liberal type—at the furthest remove of the party from Mr. Midas, who regards himself as the pillar of its strength in the peninsula, and is regarded by his young neighbour as an insidious element of its weakness everywhere. Young Mr. Denys stands firm for Church and Queen, for Law and Order, for Responsibility and Subordination, but he stands firm too for more of that Equality which Richard Blythe went to seek in New Zealand. He plays with the idea of every man of character having a vote, and says that when that good time comes there will be the best chance ever the world has seen of government getting itself well done, and in the interest of the whole nation; for as the great laborious mass of the people have no private ends to serve beyond the satisfaction of the day's wants, they are more

likely to follow righteousness for its own sake, and to sacrifice self for the common weal, than are the classes who fight each one for their own hand and who can keep uppermost—with incalculable waste of powder and shot—while needful work waits, multitudes pine for scarcity of bread, and the dry rot of popular distrust creeps hither and thither amongst the timbers of the house.

The young squire's mother takes a great and growing pride in him, and Kitty gives him leave to aspire. He has the staying power that ultimately goes far, and, if he live, will gratify their ambition to the full.

"I see every year pass with regret," his mother acknowledges. "Every year gives me more to do and to enjoy, my happiness increases, every day counts for a day in my experience. Three events I watch for—for

Guy Francis Meade to come to New Place; for Hughie to win a seat in the House of Commons; and for the birth of an heir at the Manor House."

"For which three events there is time enough yet," says Hughie. "Let us take life slowly, and feel it as we go."

Nevertheless the gratification of one of his mother's three wishes is almost in sight. The Oldbury constituents have just now fallen out of love with their member who took Mr. James Herrick's seat (chiefly on the ground of his rash declaration that Christianity may go forward on a powder-cart), and have invited young Mr. Denys to be prepared to contest the borough at the next general election. Kitty has heartily consented, and takes immense interest in eliciting his natural sentiments, and helping him to clear them into

principles—political principles that will work. So does his mother. So does Mr. Orme. He is very young, but that is a good fault, and his joyous manliness will find him in pluck and spirit to help others like himself in putting the drag on the party coach, when some headstrong leader gets the bit within his teeth and runs a-muck amongst popular enthusiasms and across the ruts of popular prejudices, threatening to upset it altogether.

THE END.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO
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